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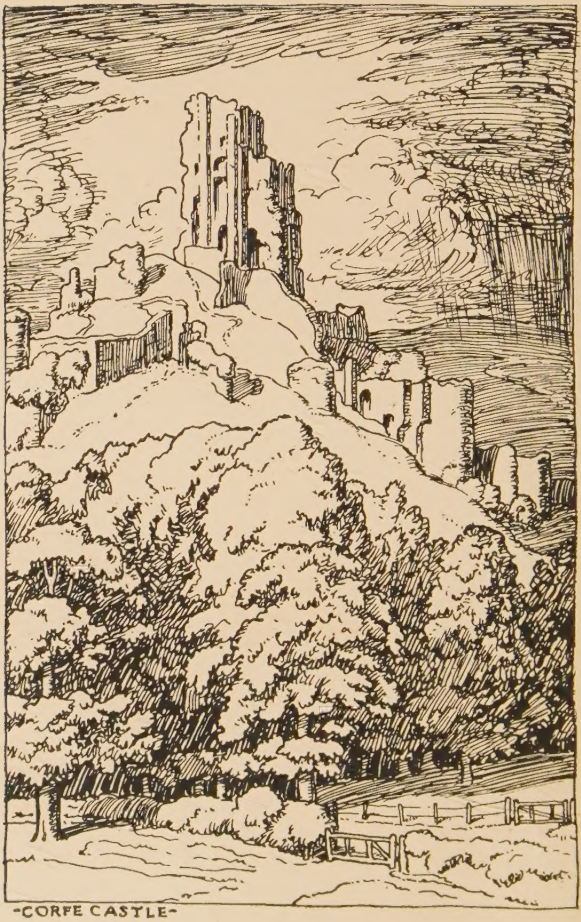

-CORFE CASTLE-

THE OPEN ROAD IN ENGLAND

AN INFORMAL AND INTIMATE GUIDE TO THE HIGHWAYS & BY-WAYS OF ENGLAND

By
JOHN PRIOLEAU
Author of "The Adventures of Imshi," "Imshi in New Europe," and "Little Motor Tours"

WITH NUMEROUS DRAWINGS BY JOHN GARSIDE

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To my Friend

JOHN WEIR

A book for those who prefer country air to town air, the road to the street, the face of England to the charm of anywhere else.

A series of reflections on nearly every part of England and Wales, as seen in spring, summer, autumn, and winter, by the author from his car, mainly over week-ends.

A book for lovers of the country, of the open road, and of England, written by one.

PREFACE

If in these sketches of what may be seen all the year round on English roads I succeed in conveying any impression of the splendour of the English country to those who only know it by hearsay, and so, perhaps, be of a little help to them in their travels along the greatest highways and by-ways in the world, I shall be more than content.

If the book has no accepted form, it is because it was written in the same way as every motor-cruise in England should be undertaken—begun by chance, continued without plan, finished without intention.

My gratitude is due to the editor of the *Observer* for permission to use articles which have appeared in his paper.

John Prioleau.

London, *March* 1929.

CONTENTS

PART I—SOUTH OF THE THAMES

CHAP. PAGE

I. SURREY 1

On Surrey. Its Hills. Open Country for the Londoner. Its Moors and Heaths. Swinley Forest. Its Secrets. Chobham Ridges.

II. SURREY AND SUSSEX 14

The Chartered Trespasser. Above Haslemere. Dial Green. Hidden Villages. Crooksbury Common. The River Wey. When very young. Fote Hill. The South Downs. Ashdown Forest. A different Road to Brighton. The Brighton Country.

III. SUSSEX 33

The Treasure-ground of the Sussex Border. Maidstone to Battle. Ancient Names. A Riverine Country. Rat's Castle. The Marsh. Puck and his Rewards and Fairies. The Hills in Snow. Unfamiliar Commons.

IV. KENT 46

Behind the White Cliffs. The French look. Tenterden. The North Downs Orchards. Some names. Senlac Day. Lanes and hills. An Isle of Rest. The Ships of the World. The Dutch fleet and Charles II. The Pilgrims' Way.

V. HAMPSHIRE, WILTSHIRE, BERKSHIRE 63

The Trout Country. Test, Itchen, and Wallop—and their Owners. The Meon Valley in Spring. The Peace of the Hampshire Border. Silchester. The Port Way. Freefolk. The High Downs. An Owl. The Kingdom of the Rabbits. The Valley of the Avon. Savernake Forest. The Berkshire Downs. Blowing Stone.

VI. HAMPSHIRE 80

The Isle of Wight, with its inconvenient River. Yarmouth, the Smiling Haven. The Needles. Alpine Roads. The Magic Wood. Merlin. Buckler's Hard. Ways in the Wood.

PART II—WEST OF THE SOLENT

CHAP. PAGE

VII. DORSETSHIRE, WILTSHIRE 93
All the Year round on the Dorset Coast. The Isle of Purbeck, and a great view. Dorset Uplands. The Lucky Land of By-ways. On the Hill-sides. Sherborne and Shaftesbury. Cranborne Chase. A Relic of Old England.

VIII. SOMERSETSHIRE, DEVONSHIRE 103
'Twixt Severn and Channel. A Comfortable Country. Wells and Glastonbury. The Vale of Avalon. The Gate to the West. The Insult of Pinchbeck Switzerlands. The Blackdowns. A Woodman-artist's Road. The Prehistoric Beast. The Road between the Moors.

IX. DEVONSHIRE 112
The Fortunate County. Dartmoor. The most Beautiful Road in England. Widdecombe-in-the-Moor. The Happy House. Sea-clean Air. Some Devonshire Ways.

PART III—NORTH OF THE SEVERN

X. HEREFORDSHIRE, MONMOUTHSHIRE, GLOUCESTERSHIRE, WORCESTERSHIRE 123
The Forest of Dean. 'Twixt Wye and Severn. The Road across the Cotswold. Monmouth Spires. Malvern Hills. A Nest on the Wall. The Wonder and Pingry Tump. Cotswold By-ways. The Heart of Old England. Cheltenham. The Guitings.

XI. WALES 133
Welsh By-ways. Brecon. The Black Mountains. The Itho Dinas Mawddwy. Lake Vyrnwy. Pilgrimages. The Luck of the Road. The Ghost Mountains. Goats, Ancient Britons and Elementals. The Peculiar Behaviour of the Sea. Where the French landed. The Kingdom of Pan. Snowdon. Autumn in the Hills. The end of the Greatest Road of all. An Island of Peace. Radnor Forest. Shropshire Hills. A Mediaeval Stronghold.

PART IV—BY MERSEY, TWEED, & HUMBER

XII. NOTTINGHAMSHIRE, DERBYSHIRE, YORKSHIRE, WESTMORLAND 155
The Industrial Patch and how to avoid it. Robin Hood's Country. Haddon Hall. A Devon man goes North. The Dales. Bainbridge. Swaledale. The Emptiest Road in England. Its Difficulties. Fortunate Towns. Nidderdale. A Witch's Broomstick. Bolton Abbey. Fells and Lakes. Kirkstone Pass.

XIII. NORTHUMBRIA, YORKSHIRE 170
North of the Wall. The Winged Hats. Lilac, May and Gorse. Tees and Teviot. The Cleveland and Hambleton Hills.

PART V—EAST OF THE TRENT AND OUSE

CHAP. PAGE

XIV. LINCOLNSHIRE, NORFOLK, SUFFOLK, ESSEX . . 183

The Fens. Stamford. Hereward the Wake and the First Dressmaker. The Little Ships of all the North. Winter Sunlight on the Wash. East Anglia. The Constable Country. Epping Forest.

PART VI—NORTH OF THE THAMES

XV. BUCKINGHAMSHIRE, HERTFORDSHIRE, BERKSHIRE . 201

Among the Chilterns. In Spring. Howe Hill. Christmas Common. The Glory of Kop Hill. Beech Woods in October. The Ugliness and Value of the By-passes. The Reward of the Barnet By-pass. At the Feet of the Chilterns. Thames-side roads in Winter. To Goring and back.

XVI. HUNTINGDONSHIRE, LINCOLNSHIRE, NORTHAMPTONSHIRE, BEDFORDSHIRE, OXFORDSHIRE, CAMBRIDGESHIRE 216

The Deserted County. Bridges at Huntingdon and St. Ives. An Empty Land. Peterborough to Woodstock and Warwick to Bedford. Brill, and its Views. Oxford and Cambridge.

LIST OF MAPS

NO.		PAGE
	ENGLAND AND WALES	*Endpaper*
1.	PUTTENHAM, DORKING, EWHURST	3
2.	LONDON MOORS	12
3.	BLACKDOWN HILL	17
4.	BYWAYS TO THE SOUTH DOWNS	19
5.	THE SOUTH DOWNS	21
6.	ASHDOWN FOREST	24
7.	A BETTER WAY TO BRIGHTON	26
8.	PUCK'S COUNTRY	37
9.	HILLS AND COMMONS	42
10.	BEHIND THE WHITE CLIFFS	49
11.	WEST KENT	51
12.	THE NORTH DOWNS	53
13.	HAMPSHIRE RIVERS	64
14.	THE KINGDOM OF THE RABBITS	71
15.	ROUND SAVERNAKE	75
16.	BERKSHIRE DOWNS	77
17.	THE ISLE OF WIGHT	81
18.	THE NEW FOREST	84
19.	FORDINGBRIDGE TO BUCKLER'S HARD	87
20.	THE ISLE OF PURBECK	95
21.	DORSET HILLS	98
22.	CRANBORNE CHASE	100
23.	THE BLACKDOWNS	106
24.	TAUNTON TO BARNSTAPLE	110
25.	BYWAYS ON DARTMOOR	114
26.	EAST DEVON	118
27.	THE FOREST OF DEAN	125
28.	THE COTSWOLD	130
29.	WELSH HILLS	136
30.	THE GHOST MOUNTAINS	138

NO.		PAGE
31.	The Snowdon Country	141
32.	Anglesey	145
33.	Yorkshire Moors	161
34.	The Harrogate Country	164
35.	The Lakes and Fells	167
36.	North of the Wall	171
37.	The Cheviots	175
38.	The Cleveland Hills	177
39.	Lincoln and the Fens	184
40.	East Anglia	188
41.	The Constable Country	193
42.	Through Epping Forest	197
43.	The Chilterns	203
44.	The Way to Kop Hill	205
45.	Thames-side Roads	207
46.	The Northern By-passes	211
47.	Huntingdon	218
48.	The Shires	220
49.	Brill	222
50.	Oxford to Cambridge	225

PART I

SOUTH OF THE THAMES

CHAPTER I

SURREY

THE roadfarer and the lover of England will find that, like those of Cleopatra and Lady Hamilton, the charms of his passion change, and are renewed and increased incessantly. You may think that you know any part of England so well and so truly by heart that it is impossible for you to discover any new thing by road or lane, any change of colour or mood in hill or copse, any fresh look about the meadows sloping down to the river's bank. The beauty of England is a thing apart, greater far than the beauty of any other land, in that you do not see it in a fixed portrait, but in a countless series of exquisite miniatures, whose subjects have been painted, and are constantly re-painted, in ten thousand moods.

With scarcely an exception, it is impossible to pick out of the map of England any part of which this, and a great deal more that is far beyond the powers of description, is not true. Who has seen the English Lakes alike on two days, mornings or evenings? Who can drive through any part of Devonshire and not, if he has eyes in his head, be forced to say, "I had no idea that this looked so exquisite"?

Who has ever been able to count the glories of Kent, and, if he were so horribly-minded, catalogue them? Nobody that I have ever heard of, and nobody has, or ever will, I feel sure, ever see the borders of Sussex and Surrey and Hampshire except alive with astonishing beauty.

. . . . .

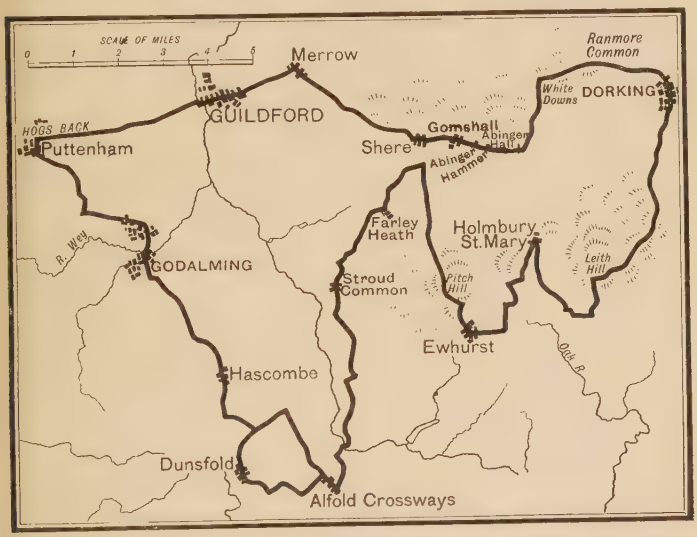
There is something about these borders which, despite the monstrous disease of building, that is spreading plague-like in every direction, draws the roadfarer back again and again. No matter how well you think you know the road down there, no matter how accurately you can describe the peculiar loveliness of this or that hill or wood, every time you go down there you go to a new place, or, if you prefer it, to a well-beloved old one, in a new setting, and a new dress. It does not matter in the very least how many thousands of people, in their thousands of cars, make this or that gorgeous spot a meeting-place of multitudes on Sundays. Nothing, not even ginger-beer stalls, charabancs, and picnic parties to the number of forty to the acre, can do more than affront the beauty of the Surrey hills. They are perfectly incapable of spoiling them.

One of the most conventionally familiar, and, if the expression be permitted, overdone drives from London, is that to Hindhead. Picnic parties dot the sides of the Devil's Punch Bowl hill from Guildford, palatial hotels crown its summit, yet none of these things avails for a single instant to distract your delighted gaze over one of the most varied and exquisite views in Europe.

Here is a way to Hindhead and places beyond, which I take very often indeed, when the sickness of bricks and mortar gets beyond all bearing. Follow the Portsmouth road to Guildford. Main roads, alas, have lost much of their romantic charm, but I hope it will be many years before the Portsmouth road loses its amazing beauty. Drive

down it for the thousandth time, and you will fall for the thousandth time into ecstasies over this most royal highway. The Portsmouth road is one of the most treasured possessions of us roadfarers. I would forbid all conversation in all motor-cars on the road between Esher and Petersfield.

At Guildford you leave it and climb half-way up the Hog's Back, taking the precipitous turn to the left down to Puttenham, a leafy lane which leads you through Elstead,



across Otley Common, and after a sharp right-hand bend at Pitch Place to the Devil's Jumps. Just beyond here, due west, lie Frensham Ponds, which are again beauties of the borders, stoutly resisting the ravages of the daily tripper. The sandy roads about Frensham Ponds when the gorse is in bloom are amongst the delightful things in the whole of delightful England. Take the road from the Devil's Jumps to Hindhead, which is a heartening climb of some five hundred feet in two miles. At the summit you cross the Portsmouth road and drop down a steep hill to Haslemere,

and you will, for the hundredth time, be bitterly envious of those spoilt darlings of fortune who have houses on the hillside overlooking that wooded valley. At Haslemere you must make up your mind to the prospect of roads which are little more than tracks, and also to the possibility of having to retrace your steps. Bearing this in mind, take the road up Haste Hill, past Chase Farm to Blackdown Hill, a most desirable Surrey head, some nine hundred feet high, whence you get views which in very truth will make you forget all about bricks and mortar. Should the road, or rather lack of it, by Chase Farm defeat you, you can go by the Chichester road, turning up off it to the left about a mile from Haslemere. This will lead you to the same point as Chase Farm track. In any case you should explore it, for it is undoubtedly one of the most beautiful roads you are likely to see.

When you have decided that the spectacle of other people being able to live in such a place gets past all bearing, you slide down from the Blackdown Hill and Parkhurst House and Shilland Farm to Shillingly Park, and through the woods and fields of the valley turn your face to London once more at Dunsfold. Keep to the right until you have crossed the railway, just short of Cranleigh Station, and then take the left-hand road north to Stroud Common, where you bear right again over Farley Heath, and so come over Albury Heath to Albury and the Silent Pool at the foot of Clandon Downs. From here your way home lies either over Newlands Corner to West Clandon and the Portsmouth road, or over Newlands Corner to the Leatherhead road by East Clandon, or, turning sharp right at the Silent Pool, through Shere, Gomeshall and Dorking, where I would advise you to finish a wonderful drive by climbing up over Box Hill to Tadworth. From here it is only five miles to Epsom, Tattenham Corner, and the Grand Stand.

Of all the many beautiful places within a hundred miles of London, I always look upon Leith Hill as the luckiest. Beauty spots are apt to have the bloom rubbed off them, in summer at all events, through their sheer popularity. Their admirers are too numerous and constant for any individual of them really to have the chance of appreciating their loveliness to its full. Especially is this true of those within an hour or two's drive of town. The Home Counties have very few places to compare with Newlands Corner, and—although the newest mushroom growth of offensive houses on the other side of the River Mole is rapidly spoiling half the view—Box Hill and, of course, Hindhead. Yet your constant lover of these wonderful places is, to put it mildly, embarrassed by the crowd of rival swains. It is difficult to admire properly in a throng.

Leith Hill is certainly one of the loveliest places in England; it is in the middle of one of the most overcrowded counties; it is less than thirty miles from Victoria; and yet it is quite likely that, when you take your car to the roads which wind over and round it, you will never see a sign of anything remotely resembling a crowd. I may have been exceptionally lucky in my many journeys to this enchanted hill, but the fact remains that I have yet to come to it in any way but as an everyday traveller comes upon an unexpected find. Leith Hill and its surroundings seem to have discovered the secret of remaining a perpetual surprise.

It is not a long journey from London to this unusual hill, but it is just about the best of the short ones, so far as comfort and pleasant scenery are concerned. Starting from Hyde Park Corner, any convenient way to the Robin Hood Gate of Richmond Park is first followed. Here turn off to the left on to the Kingston by-pass, which, after some interruptions, brings you to within a short distance of Ewell. This new road is remarkably beautiful, and, as

you roll swiftly along it—it is unfortunately a road which invites you to go fast—you will feel something of a trespasser. The woods and hills on either hand seem so private. They have the air of hermits suddenly dispossessed of their protecting seclusion and ruthlessly exposed to the public stare. As a fact, this is precisely what has happened to them. We who use that new cemented track are looking for the first time upon those trees and fields and glades. It is only now that those silver-birch trunks have seen or heard a motor-car. The Kingston by-pass is new country.

After Ewell you should turn left on to the Reigate road and follow it as far as Burgh Heath, which lies on the top of a very long climb, a good deal more trying than it looks. It must be a full two miles from the railway bridge to Tadworth Court and every yard of it is against the collar. After Tadworth Court you keep to the right at the fork (leaving the Reigate road), and keep straight on over Walton Heath to the top of Box Hill, and so come down to the Leatherhead-Dorking road. After the river, turn sharp right over Ranmore Common, which you reach after an easy but picturesque climb, and at Dunley Hill, six hundred and fifty feet up, turn to the left and drop down a long hill which leads steeply down through a tunnel of fir and beech and larch, with exquisite glimpses through their embracing limbs of heath and wood and hill. It is a wonderful road, but it must be taken with caution, as it is narrow, and in places blind and precipitous.

On reaching the Guildford–Dorking road you keep straight on till you come close to Sutton, where you turn to the left by a white wooden house with green shutters, guarded in summer by a resplendent regiment of delphiniums. You will not pass this without pangs of the bitterest envy. Not only is it a house in a dream, but it stands in an unbelievably private valley. From here, all the way past Abinger and Friday Street, you are in such country as you

cannot imagine to be within three hundred miles of Surrey. By Tanhurst you are high up in a world of firs, and space, and sky. Hereabouts, as you come under the flank of Leith Hill and come under the tower, you will remark a blue fir on your left and a willow over your head, which make it quite certain that nobody has ever been to Leith Hill before. You would have heard of those two trees if they had.

You go on climbing gently up this wonderful road, with such a view over the weald as nobody deserves to see, until you come to Coldharbour Common, an English hamlet out of the picture-books, perched on the side of the enchanted hill itself, dense firs spiring steeply above it, as if they were in the Alps themselves. You turn very sharp down to the right on the near side of the church, which stands on a shelf below the road. It leads you down past Coldharbour again, only below it, through Broome Hall Park, and down at last to the vale of Ockley Court. And even from here you can look over your shoulder and see Leith Hill in yet another light. Now it stands like a great mountain, lording it over the meek levels which lead to the River Arun. You will find it difficult to believe in Leith Hill, as a hill. It is really a mountain range.

The way home lies past Holmbury St. Mary, Sutton again, and either Dorking and the Leatherhead road, or by Newlands Corner, West Clandon, and the Portsmouth road.

. . . . .

With scarcely an exception, there is no county in England which has not got its special surprise, some fascination of either scenery, climate, or historical connections of which the ordinary well-travelled motorist is quite unaware, until, to his immense delight, he stumbles upon them. It does not matter whether the county is near or far from the crowded haunts of men, whether it has a popular seaboard, or whether it is altogether off the beaten track. There are wonderful

things to be seen within a few miles of Brighton; almost within sight of the Birkenhead Ferry; within a morning's drive of Newcastle.

One of the counties which you would suspect least of holding secrets in 1929 is Surrey, yet I am not sure, given its extent, that it cannot compete with any other in the kingdom for really unexpected beauties. It is, of course, packed from end to end with famous beauty spots, villages which are on picture postcards, and hills, woods, rivers whose names are rapidly becoming as familiar in the ears of the dwellers in other parts of the country as the streets of London.

Surrey, towards the Hampshire border, is a particularly rich treasure-ground for the motor cruiser, because, although it is striped with main roads of the busiest and noisiest kind, it is also blessed with some of the most retiring and beautiful lanes to be found anywhere in the southern counties. You can spend a whole day in your car, covering anything up to a hundred and fifty miles, nine-tenths of which, except, of course, for the necessary getting away from London, will be along really unfrequented by-ways.

Here is a day's motor meander which will show you some of the best hidden things of a county you would naturally believe to be no more private than Richmond Park.

Go down the Portsmouth road, past Cobham and the Wisley lake, and take the next turning on the right, where a sign-post directs you to the gardens of the Royal Horticultural Society. If you do not know the country, you will probably never think of going down this road except to the gardens, as the sign-post makes no mention of anything beyond. In a way you will, perhaps, be glad that it does not do so, as the next few miles towards Byfleet Station are always beautiful and generally empty. It is a real lane, twisting and turning through woods, first of all magnificent pines, and then, when you cross the River Wey just before Wisley village, oaks, beeches, hazels, and all the proper sort.

You cross the railway line by Byfleet Station and, turning sharp to the left, come out amongst the gorse and heather and loosestrife of Horsell Common. It is a tiny common, but like so many of its kind in England, manages to put on an air of immense size. It leads you into Chobham, and you follow straight on to the cross-roads on Chobham Common, about three miles farther on. Here you turn to the left through Windlesham, to Bagshot Heath, with Chobham Ridges as your destination. It might be as well to turn to the right in Windlesham and go through Bagshot along the Basingstoke road as far as the "Jolly Farmer" and then turn right. This means a whole two miles of main road, but the drive from the cross-roads at the "Jolly Farmer" over the Ridges amply repays you.

That sandy pine-bordered road is an ever-fresh joy for the hill-loving motorist. It has no hills in reality that cannot be swallowed on top gear by any decent car, but it swings, climbs, and drops round the little knolls and valleys, and shows you such exquisite views over what seems to be about half Surrey from its several summits that it needs very little imagination to believe yourself in a range of real hills. Just now that road along Colony Bog and Bisley Common, round to the left by the railway past Pirbright Common, is a welter of colours, the firs and larches standing up out of a sea of gorse and heather, and the scent of bracken hangs heavily in the little valleys.

Just beyond Brookwood you should turn right to Worplesdon, and then give yourself up to some miles of delightful zigzagging. In Worplesdon it would be a good thing to turn to the left and make for Mayford and Old Woking, which, for the benefit of those who do not know it, is as unlike new Woking as it is possible to imagine. Then comes Send, and soon afterwards you cross the Portsmouth road opposite the way to West Clandon. Follow this for a few yards and then bear to the left, and a mile farther on

turn to the left again by Hungry Hill. This will bring you past Ockham Park and Ockham and Martyrs Green, where your homeward way lies again to the left through the pine woods of Wisley.

Looked at on the map, this straggling little cruise seems a very trivial affair, but, in point of fact, it is one of the most beautiful day's drives within reach of London, or of any town within fifty miles of it. The total distance from Wisley out and back is forty miles.

. . . . .

You will often hear the London motorist grumbling that he has to go far afield to find anything like real country. He shows you on the map this and that agglomeration of villages, new and old, golf links, "residential districts," motor-bus lines and hotels by the wayside which have an immense week-end attendance of cars standing outside, and asks pathetically how it is possible to get a breath of fresh air without driving a hundred miles for it. If the grumbler, however, will concede fifteen miles, or, in extreme cases, twenty, of urban beginnings, he can find his breath of fresh air, by which he means, of course, open country, at not more than an hour's drive in any given direction, north, south, east, or west.

It is my belief that the average Englishman is deplorably ignorant, not only of what a beautiful country he has the honour and privilege to live in, but of how conveniently situated his capital is. For example, does the average London-inhabiting motor-owner realise that in a little over an hour he can reach moorlands in many ways as lonely as any in England, and in some ways more beautiful?

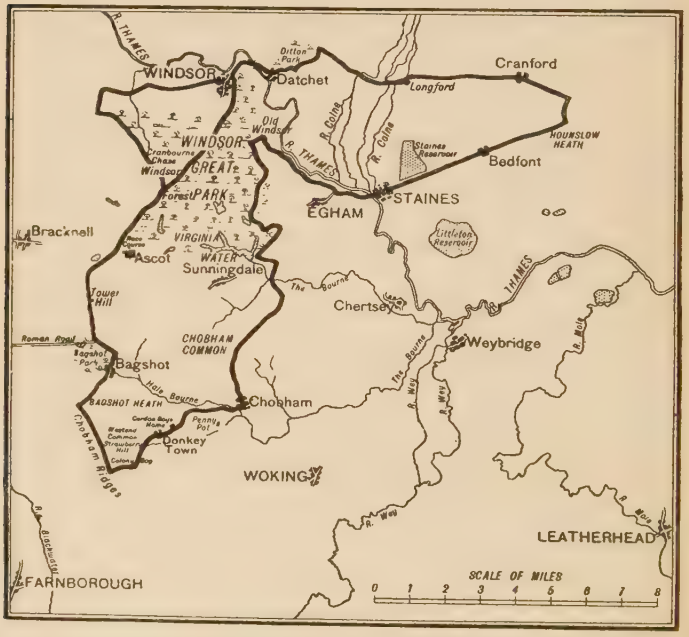
The moors of London, or at least those which you may spend a week-end exploring, lie between towns and railways which I hope never to have to mention, for the sound of their names must inevitably call up a horrible vision of

acres of red-brick villas, with blue slate roofs, and quarter-of-an-hour train-services to the City, and motor-buses, and all the things which are never found on proper moors. My London moors are, I cannot deny it, of small extent, but they have this in common with their greater brethren in Devon and Yorkshire, that from most points on their almost countless roads you look out over an expanse of country to which there seems to be no end save the horizon.

To reach the London moors you must take any convenient road to Old Windsor. Here, or immediately afterwards, you turn to the left off the Windsor-Staines road and make for the main Southampton road, which you reach after passing the Great Park, Bishop's Gate, and the Wheatsheaf Hotel. Immediately after the latter, on the other side of the Southampton road, you take a turn which leads towards Virginia Water Station, bearing to the right, however, at the first cross-roads. On your right is Wentworth Park. You go on through Trumpsgreen, and after crossing the railway you turn to the right again and arrive upon Chobham Common. Keep straight on past Chobham Place to the village itself. If you have never been here before you will be delighted at the picturesque main street and the little yellow-plastered houses of dignified age which stand on either side. In spite of the fact that it is within a stone's throw of half a dozen unmentionable places, it is even better in my eyes than Bennington. Next you take the road which leads you past the Gordon Boys' Home and Donkey Town, and thereafter for the rest of the run you look out on either side upon some of the nicest wild country.

Westend Common, which contains in its tiny extent Strawberry Hill, Strawberry Bottom, and Colony Bog, appeals to me with peculiar force, as it has so much the air of the road I love better than any in the world. This is most of the way from Le Plan d'Orgon to Brignoles and Fréjus, in Provence. On a November day, it is true,

you miss the colour, the wonderful yellow of that sandy highway along which you may drive your car not only as fast as she will go, but over such sweeping, generous rises and falls as make her seem to you to be bewitched. On a certain day, when I drove over the London moors, the



colours were those of pines and October heather, and there was a mackerel sky with an occasional gleam of sun breaking through, but, to make up for the gold and blue of the Brignoles road and the foothills of the Alps, there was, on my left, that sense of distance which, to the London-bound, is beyond price. There is not a house to be seen. No doubt there are a dozen close by, but their builders had the remarkable taste to make them invisible from the moor road. You are at the ridiculous altitude of two hundred feet above

sea-level, but as everything points to your being at the very least two thousand feet, I cannot see that it matters. The wind that blows through the pines is the same wind that stirs the heather on Dartmoor and the umbrella pines of the Maritime Alps—or, at least, it seems so to me.

After crossing Colony Bog, you reach Chobham Bridge, and turn sharp to the right to reach that famous and most happily-named inn, the "Jolly Farmer." Here, for two miles, as far as the new slip road which misses Bagshot, you must drive on a highway, but you lose it after the railway bridge, where you turn to the left, and, going through Swinley Forest past Tower Hill, see yet another amazing stretch of apparently limitless moorland. You take the first to the right after this, and, crossing the main road just west of Ascot, you go down into Windsor Forest, and aim for home either through the Great Park, which is the road straight in front of you, or past Cranbourne Chase and the new lodge to Oakley Green, and so to Windsor.

You will notice that I have been at great pains not to mention certain names until the end, but as this London moorland drive is one which must not be undertaken without a map of a scale of one inch to the mile, I am compelled to tell you now that places like Chertsey and Woking, Farnborough and Bagshot, and artillery-ranges and camps, ring the London moors about. Do not think of Woking or Farnborough, or, at any rate, do not think of them until you have returned home, when it no longer matters. But lose no time in going out on to the London moors. With me, I think, you will fall under their spell, and with me you will agree that you could not get a better breath of fresh air anywhere within a hundred miles of St. Paul's.

CHAPTER II

SURREY AND SUSSEX

THE ordinary decent wandering motorist in search of nothing he ought not to have, patiently and legitimately pursuing a view or a place of peace and repose, has a sound criminal streak in him. He will, like a good Englishman, obey all by-laws while on the King's highway. He will, while on a main road, sound his horn at "concealed drives," regardless of the absurdity of the request. He will slow down for ten-mile-an-hour limits in places where it is patent to the meanest intelligence that no such limit is needed. He will take due notice of all those dangerous corners which turn out in the end to be so safe. He will be very exact in all his ways, for he will know that only by blind obedience to trivialities can the roadfarer be safe from far worse things.

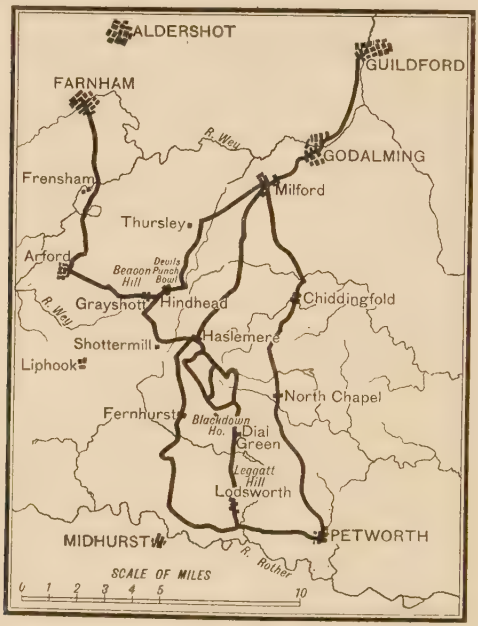
He is incredibly well-behaved. On the roads of no other country in the world would anybody dream of comporting themselves as does the English wandering motorist. He is almost as legal as the law. Yet he is at heart a pleasant criminal. He has absolutely no use for the word "private" when applied to roads which interest him. He

knows, possibly unconsciously, that he has a right of way over quite a large number of otherwise private properties in Great Britain, and that he could successfully sustain and prove that right before a court of justice. You might therefore think that he would feel some tinge of respect for the unquestioned rights of those who own the lands through which he chooses to wander. He feels none—at least in private. A "private" notice board is simply to him an incentive to trespass. He is, as I said, a licensed criminal, and as such he has the instant sympathy of every law-abiding fellow-countryman.

There are numbers of private roads in England which are forbidden to us, and there cannot be one which has not been to every one of us, at the very least, a temptation. I thought I knew them all—at all events within a fairly wide radius—but I have since discovered one which I thought in particular was impregnable. Not too sure of my facts, I will not be too particular in my directions. It is a road, one of two, leading steeply up the big hill beyond Haslemere, on the borders of Surrey and Hampshire. It takes you to the top of Blackdown, from the outside edge of which you can see a great deal of Surrey on the north and of Sussex and Hampshire on the south and east. Notice-boards say that you can go so far and no farther, and for many years I have blindly believed them. I have longed to trespass, to go just a little farther on, to look round that last corner. And for years I have been ridiculously legal, sheepishly turning my car round at what I have believed to be the end of the permitted road. Now I know better.

If you want to see one of the most beautiful places, and from it some of the most beautiful views in England, and to do it almost by yourself, be as courageous as I was, and share with me my comforting discoveries. At the top of the sharp climb I have mentioned, which is about nine hundred feet above the sea, there stands a notice-board informing you

that after some thousand yards farther on the road becomes private. Don't take this too much to heart. Keep on by that wonderful avenue, with its tantalising glimpses of great blue views between the trees on either hand, until you come to the real truth of the matter—which is that the road



straight ahead, announced as private, is not the only one and is not the road you want to follow. There is a gate and another notice and an air of finality, but your own road dodges unobtrusively to the left, and you, having had all the thrill of crime, become comfortably legal once more. No more notice-boards will disturb or inspire you.

Only those who know the best of Surrey and Sussex and Hampshire can guess at what awaits you when you have turned that bend to the left. It is a succession of exquisite

miniatures of the English Home Counties. The road winds downhill round dark little spinneys, skirting the edges of toy valleys, and dropping down every now and then across such village commons as you only see in old prints. For example, after sliding down the eastern slope of Blackdown Hill itself, along narrow country lanes which seem never to have so much as a wheel-track left on them, you cross, by Dial Green, a tiny stretch of common with little blue ponds on your left, and come suddenly within view of a common just before Lodsworth, which at the right time of year is blazing golden with gorse and cherry-blossom. Just as you come to the northern edge of it you see before you the kind of small green hill crowned with cherry-trees which you have probably only met up to now in the more attractive forms of embroidery. This common by Lodsworth, which I believe is officially known as Leggatt Hill, is ahead of any common I know in having views on three sides of it, and in being a perfect picture in itself. Down to white ducks and ancient oaks, it is perfect in every detail.

A mile beyond Lodsworth you come to the road which joins Midhurst and Petworth, and if you are homeward bound to London your best way is to turn to the left towards the latter and to reach the Portsmouth road at Milford by way of North Chapel and Chiddingfold. There may be better summer Sunday drives for the Londoner than this trespassing one over the secrets of Blackdown, and if there are I shall be very glad to hear of them.

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Sussex is a county which one would naturally expect to have the fewest lost corners. So many main roads tear through it to places like Eastbourne and Brighton that you would not think it possible for anything to have been left unspoilt. As a matter of fact the country which lies between these arteries is not only some of the most beautiful in the

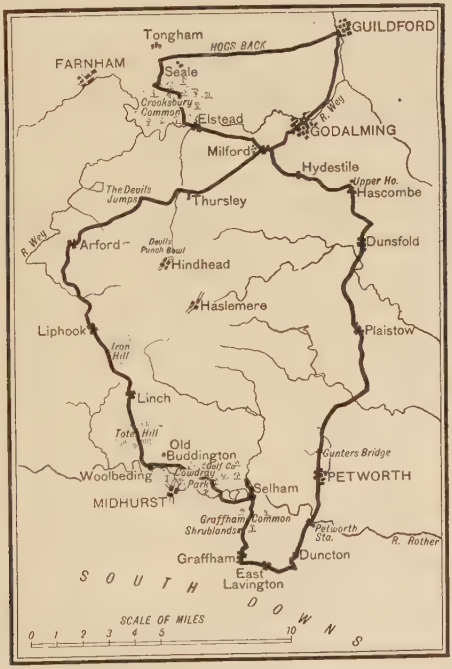
south of England, but also, perhaps, the least touched by To-day.

The Londoner, in his search for real lanes and commons and forgotten villages, will find them all, and of the best kind, if he follows this winding road. Taking Guildford as the point of departure, you should follow the Hog's Back as far as the turning down to Seale. From the top of Great Down, about five hundred feet up, you look out south over most of the country you are going to explore. Your road makes a rough circle round Hindhead and Blackdown, and, if not in reality, you can make a pleasant picture of it in your mind's eye before you drop down into the first real country, the little patch which lies between the Southampton and Portsmouth roads. You take the road from Seale to Elstead, which you reach after passing through the exquisite Crooksbury Common, which is one of those astonishing untouched places we are still able to find within forty miles of London.

Among the rich meadows you meet here for the first time the River Wey, very young and very undecided as to which way to go. It changes its mind apparently about a dozen times in every three hundred yards, and altogether makes itself obligingly picturesque. The song of birds in this place is as likely as not to keep you here for the better part of the day. It is an absolutely perfect piece of English home countryside, and it is certain that you will be the only human being in sight. On leaving it, you take the road to Milford, and then by winding lanes, each more beautiful than the last, you cross to Hydestile and over Hydon Heath you reach Hascombe. Here you turn south and follow another delightfully empty and winding lane past Dunsfold Common and Plaistow to Gunter's Bridge, one of the most beautiful spots in the whole day's drive, and Petworth.

From here follow the road past Petworth Station to the foot of Duncton Hill. Just before the beginning of the

common take the road to the right, which leads you, by the courtesy of the owner, through Lavington Park. Between here and Graffham, the road is probably one of the most picturesquely situated of any in the county. It runs like a narrow shelf under the sheer bulk of the South Downs, and



from it you look out on the road over the valley of the Rother and the Weald, running up to the hills beyond Fernhurst, and on the left straight up into the over-arching beeches which clothe the steep side of Duncton Hill. As far as here you will have driven through a dozen different kinds of scenery, and your homeward run is every bit as varied. For example, Graffham Common leads you to wonderful pine woods by Selham and over clearings where

the gorse flames against the purple trunks. Wherever you look, when you have the strength of mind to take your eyes off your immediate surroundings, you see behind and before you the dark heights of Hindhead and the South Downs. It is a place of bewitchment.

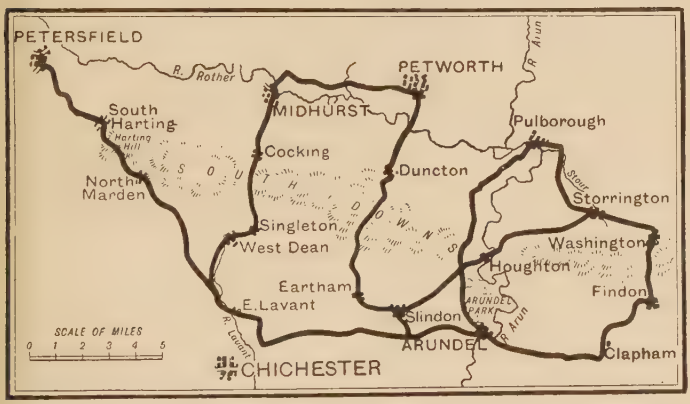
Soon after Selham the road runs through a tiny little gorge, very narrow, with high over-arching rocks on either side. This brings you unexpectedly into the middle of Cowdray Park, and on leaving this you take the road to Woolbeding, and climb up Fote Hill, where you get another of these breath-taking views. The South Downs lie some eight miles away, and, on the proper sort of sunny day, look about as big as the Pyrenees. Then come Linch and Liphook, between which on another summit, called Iron Hill, you drive over a miniature mountain road, which twists over the hill-side through a mass of rhododendrons. At a certain point by Hollycombe you will stop for an indefinite period. Doubtless you will ask the usual futile question as to why nobody has ever painted what your delighted eye is trying to absorb. The obvious answer is that nobody has been genius enough to do it or brave enough to attempt it.

The South Downs are officially a single range of hills, running between Lewes and the valley of the Meon. Looking at the map, you would suppose these pleasant hills to belong to the same family as those above Brighton. Nothing more different could possibly be imagined. It is not only because the roads round East Dean and Goodwood, South Harting, and Petersfield are as beautifully wooded as any in the whole of England, that they are as different from the Brighton Downs as France is from England, but because of a peculiarly pleasant air of intimacy—or, if you prefer it, privacy—which you will not find in many other parts of South England.

There are great estates in these parts, and by the kindness

of their owners you can follow the road through some of them, but the intimacy I mean is not exactly that suggested by private property. It is simply that this end of the South Downs seems to belong peculiarly to yourself. You think of home as you wander through their beech woods.

The changing seasons need not be considered at all when you think of taking your car to the South Downs. There is no moment of the year when they are not beautiful; no day



spent among them—except, of course, one of fog—which you could possibly count as anything but sheer gain. Under grey skies in late autumn or winter, just as much as in June sunshine, those winding by-ways on the south edge, with their views over Selsey Bill and the Channel, are worth any trouble to become acquainted with. The oak and birch and beech woods on these South Downs are, I suppose, at their most exquisite at the turn of the leaf, but in the next few months, before they get their new radiant dress, they have in their stark limbs an austere beauty with quite as strong an appeal.

For the Londoner who considers these Downs to be his especial property, the run is a particularly pleasant one.

You follow the Portsmouth road through Guildford to Milford, where you turn to the left through Chiddingfold, North Chapel, and so to Petworth. Just over two miles to the south lie the Downs, and your road to Duncton, under the north edge, gives you some very pleasant preliminary views of them. The climb up from Duncton over the famous hill shows you the valley of the Rother, and between the tree trunks you get some wonderful glimpses of Hindhead and its fellow hills.

Up at the top, about two miles from Duncton itself, you have a choice of roads. The first to the right takes you to Singleton by way of East Dean, and the second, which you will find about a mile farther on, brings you to the same point through Selhurst Park and by Goodwood Park and racecourse. I prefer the latter myself. Although most people have a decent horror of driving through another man's property uninvited, these particular six miles or so are so beautiful that they will certainly pocket their scruples—which in any case are superfluous, as the roads are public.

All these Downs hereabouts, and those which stand on either hand as you take the road to Petersfield, will strike you as very gracious country. They are less severe than the Berkshire kind, more colourful, warmer, and altogether more human. The uplands by Goodwood are a perfect example of the best of Sussex land. It is difficult to describe the effect they have on the wanderer who sees them for the first time, but an indifferent definition is this—knowing you have never seen them before, you instantly recognise them. The fact is, for most of us, they are the England of our dreams.

The way down from the Downs is from North Marden down the celebrated South Harting Hill, in itself a Down road quite unlike any you will see in other parts of England. Again you have wonderful old beeches standing high above you, with their enormous roots shoring up the banks as

if they had been put there for no other purpose. Down in the Weald you come to Petersfield, whence your way home lies by Rogate and Midhurst to Petworth; or, if you prefer it, more directly by the Portsmouth road through Liphook and Guildford. Before you turn your bonnet northwards, however, it is worth while taking a last look backwards at those great smiling Downs, those grey-green hills, which mean so much more to the homeward-returning Englishman than all the cliffs of Kent. There is not their like for quiet beauty and personal appeal between the Foreland and Land's End.

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As the days shorten and our driving-hours are reduced, the pleasant short tour falls more and more into two kinds—the tour which takes you really afield, at home or abroad, when, for the sake of reaching a given destination at or about a given hour, you must sometimes drive in the dark; and what may be called the day-tour, the run of a hundred or a hundred and fifty miles out and home which will give you new things to see while the daylight lasts, and brings you back, over familiar country, in the later hours, when it does not matter whether you can see it or not.

The latter tour can, naturally, be planned like the former, by linking up a number of short-day drives, and if you are not entirely dependent on hotels for the night's accommodation it is as good a way of winter touring as any—and it is a very grievous mistake to suppose that motor-cruising time ends with the last of summer weather. Any old-timer, with records and recollections of Homeric runs in the days when "non-stop" runs of fifty miles were remembered for weeks at a time, will give you a thousand excellent reasons for motor-touring in winter. And when you remember that his Spartan motoring was done usually in conditions of complete exposure to the fury of

the weather, you will realise that the lure of the open road knows no season. It does not matter whether you drive a sketchy two-seater, with the hood indifferently patched and the windscreen of the sort which admits the maximum of wind and wet, or a centrally-heated saloon. All that matters is that you should be of the great brotherhood of the road.

We who live within fifty miles or so of London are supremely lucky in what over-building has left to us of our forests, and (if we are of the short day-tour winter roadfarer order) especially Ashdown Forest. Forest is a big

word to give this beautiful patch of gorse and heather, but the name is nothing. It remains one of the greatest winter beauty-spots in the Home Counties.

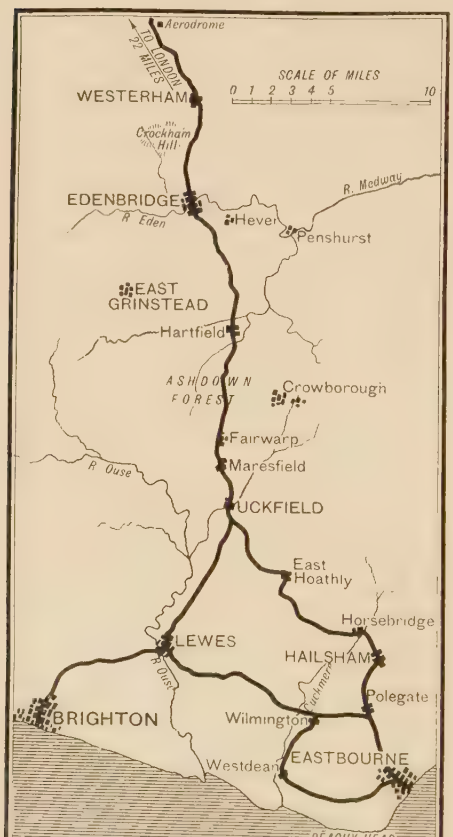
An easy tour of the forest can be begun at any point convenient to Londoners and those who live east, west, and south. Roughly speaking, Ashdown Forest lies in the space bounded by Crawley, East Grinstead, Tunbridge Wells, Wadhurst, Nutley, and Cuckfield. For one special reason I prefer to begin on the south side, say, from either Crawley or Nutley, and travel counter-clockwise, and that is because I will never willingly miss the drive down the north from the heart and summit of the forest by Camphill. There are times, especially in autumn and winter, when, in certain lights, the views from that airy road are the best in Sussex—and that is a sweeping thing to say.

Starting from Crawley, then, you should make for Turnershill, where you begin to go up into the edge of the forest, and, bearing right past Selsfield Common, come to West Hoathly and Tye Cross. All this is, very properly, on secondary roads, where traffic, even over week-ends, should be negligible at this time of year. A mile or so farther on you come to Wych Cross, a "peak" of the forest, over six hundred feet up, and turn sharp to the right south to Chelwood Gate, where a minor road on the left will bring you to Nutley and the south boundary. Keep to the left, past Camphill and Poundgate, soon after which you come to what is the only brickish part of your day's run —the parts about Crowborough. They are not offensively brickish at all, but one is inclined to wish they were not there.

You can avoid Crowborough itself, by following the lane north of the golf links to Jarvis Brook, but it comes to much the same thing in distance. You have now a not too easy itinerary to keep, unexpected branchings-off, right and left, being necessary every few miles, but as there cannot be any hurry in Ashdown Forest, or, at all events, none permitted, it is of no consequence. Your way lies meanderingly eastward through Rotherfield and Mark Cross (but not past either of their stations), the outskirts of Wadhurst, round to the left, and north again to Frant, along the bounds of Eridge Park to Eridge Station, north to Groombridge Station, and then south, up the long slope to the heart of the forest once more.

It is not far in miles, but the run up, past Friar's Gate and through the gorse and heather, till you win to the cross-roads a mile short of Camphill, is of the kind you never forget, whatever weather it may be. It is as fine in storm as in sunshine, and you do not really understand how fine until you turn to go north and down again to Hartfield. Right and left are wooded hills and valleys of England's special sort, without rivals anywhere.

At Hartfield you are out of the forest confines, but by Forest Row you come within sight of it again. Here you join the main road from Lewes, but as you only follow it as far as East Grinstead, a matter of three miles, it hardly affects your by-road average for the day. At East Grinstead bear to the left and, with a deal of pleasant wandering, come back to Crawley. The distance of the round trip is a little under seventy miles, but you would be wise to allow for a little more. It is inconceivable that you should get a sight of the forest by-roads and not at once go down them to see what lies beyond. A generous margin of time is indispensable.



Ashdown Forest plays an important part in the lives of those whose lot takes them to and from Brighton and London, and who would sooner go by train than follow the orthodox road. It is odd to reflect that barely twenty years ago the Brighton road was one of the

most popular Saturday and Sunday drives, ranking equal with the Portsmouth road as far as Hindhead, and far above the Oxford road by Maidenhead and Henley. To-day the way to Brighton, by Reigate, Redhill, or Dorking, must easily be the most disagreeable of any open to the motoring week-ender, and one can only guess that the majority of the hordes who throng those once pleasing highways must put their adoration of Brighton very far above their personal comfort. For it would be difficult to think of any situation more detestable than a seat in a car between Purley and Patcham on a fine afternoon.

Twenty years ago we could, in our deliberate way, generally do the distance in two hours; now we are lucky if we can, even in our fastest mile-eaters and with the most skilful driving, cover those fifty odd miles in much under two hours and three-quarters. The drive to Brighton by the orthodox route is, I suppose, the slowest motor-run in the country. Apart from the maddening circumstance that you are nearly always part of a procession of cars, meeting another procession, the road itself is narrow, blind, and in places dangerous.

What the majority of people remember of the main roads to Brighton, apart from their detestable nature, is that if they take the Crawley road from Reigate they pass under what I believe is a unique inn sign, and that when they have reached Handcross, where the largest policeman in England is sometimes on point duty, they have crossed a part of St. Leonard's Forest. And they know that until they get to the foot of the South Downs by Pyecombe the scenery is insignificant.

If they choose to go by Dorking they know that there may be a mile or two of pleasant scenery near Lower Beeding and Steyning; while if their choice falls on the Redhill-Cuckfield road, it is practically only between Worth and Balcombe that there will be anything to look at. With

the possible exception of Maidenhead, I do not suppose any place in England is considered duller of approach than Brighton.

Whatever the main roads may be like, however, the south coast will always draw the London week-end motorist, whether it be to the urbanities of Brighton or the comparative simplicities of Seaford and Littlehampton, or, far above these, the freedom of the open Downs which sweep from Portsdown Hill to Beachy Head. Maps are brought out and ways north and south eagerly traced which may avoid the nightmare of the suffocated high roads and to keep to unspoilt Sussex and Hampshire. There is still plenty of these two left, and it is not difficult to find one's way there at the cost of making a very modest detour or two.

Here, then, is a way to get to either Brighton or Eastbourne without, at all events on a fine day, being engulfed in a flood of sea-bound fellow-wanderers. Leave London as if for Sevenoaks, taking the road out by Dulwich College, the Crystal Palace Park Road, Beckenham, and Keston, where, on crossing the common, you take the road to Westerham by way of Biggin Hill Aerodrome. If this is your first encounter with Westerham Hill do not despise the notices on the crest which warn you about its steepness. It is not only steep (about one in six is its worst), but it is over a mile and a half long and is crossed, where the gradient is about one in twelve, by the Pilgrims' Way—a fairly frequented road. It is one of the most deceptive hills in England and should be treated with considerable respect.

On arriving at the village of Westerham, turn left and then right, for the Edenbridge road. This takes you over the last spur of the North Downs and, after a mile or two of magic woodland, shows you, at the top of Crockham Hill, a view of the Weald which has not a rival within a score of miles. Then you drop down to Edenbridge, follow the

road to Hartfield Station and, leaving the splendidly named Gallypot Street on your right, begin the long climb up into one of the more exquisite jewels of Sussex heathland.

The views on either side of the road, from here to Fairwarp, are worth crossing England to see. It may be true that much-inhabited places like Crowborough and East Grinstead are, at best, only just out of sight, but for all that makes you think of them they might be in another continent. Between Whitehouse Bank and Camphill, where you are always well over six hundred feet up, you are alone in a company of wooded hills, such as only England can show. Over gorse and heather, ash and thorn, attendant on the yellow road, you look out upon bold hills, dense with pine and oak, and, between their big shoulders, over the Weald you have just crossed. It gleams blue like the sea, in certain winds and at certain hours.

It is a wonderful place, a place for a long day's dreaming. It may be that you have come this way in order to get to Brighton or Eastbourne by a pleasant route, but if you can drive on to those places without more than a glance at what the forest can give you, you must be in a very grave condition of hurry. You should have gone by Redhill, or better still, by train. For the chances are that any appointments you have in Brighton or Eastbourne will be forgotten within a few seconds of your arrival at the top, and you will only leave that enchanted place when the dusk has blurred the outlines of the hills and the colours of land and sky.

You come down into the lowlands at Maresfield and bear to the left for Uckfield, where you take the road to Lewes if you are Brighton-bound, or to East Hoathly and Hailsham if you are for Eastbourne. If those appointments at the latter are by now too old to be remembered, I would advise you to follow the Brighton way as far as Lewes and then turn left along the road under the Downs, which passes the

Long Man of Wilmington and joins the Eastbourne road at Polegate. If you feel the need of further soul-satisfying delay, turn off it at Wilmington Green and by way of Littlington and Friston, get to your appointments by the road over Beachy Head.

I make the distance, by way of the forest, sixty-two miles to Brighton, and sixty-four and seventy-two to Eastbourne. There is not one of them you could spare.

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Few overgrown towns, least of all seaside ones, are so lucky in their surrounding country as Brighton.

The countryside, not only between places like Arundel and Eastbourne, but quite close to Brighton itself, is more than a little charming. The South Downs, especially for ten miles round Brighton, have as their only rival the best of the Berkshire Downs. Indeed, in one respect they are better than those ancient hills. The Berkshire Downs' chief attraction is their emptiness, loneliness, and air of aloofness. The South Downs very naturally cannot make any such claim, but from the point of view of sheer beauty they beat the Berkshire Downs hollow. You need only take your car up the hackneyed road to the Devil's Dyke to find out how magnificently these bold hills are shaped. The very sound of the Devil's Dyke inevitably brings to your mind a picture of charabancs and a million picnics eaten out of subsequently derelict paper bags, but in winter the Dyke is free of such horrors, the only traces of man being golf-links. And even these shrink to mere dots on the huge expanse of the Down-sides.

Within less than four miles of the West Pier you can be climbing up that Down road, with more and more of Sussex opening out before you. After the Dyke Station, where you turn off to go to Saddlescombe, the road crosses the end of what nearly deserves the name of canyon. With

an immense camel-hump Down on either hand, you look straight down some four hundred feet on to the beginning of the Sussex Weald, which stretches straight before you to the edge of St. Leonards Forest, twelve miles away. A little brook winds its way down from the hill-sides, and with the left-hand hill showing an almost precipitous bare face to the north, and the one on the right gay with beeches, makes this crack in the South Downs one of the pleasantest places to look at you can imagine. You drop down to Saddlescombe and, leaving Poynings on your left, you circle the northern base of Newtimber Hill and so come to Pyecombe, where you turn to the left and make for Clayton, a mile south of Hassocks Station.

Here you turn to the right and follow the road through Westmeston to Plumpton. Ditchling Beacon, that long, straggling hill, towers above you on your right, looking like a miniature Pyrenean rampart. There are ways, I do not like to call them roads, to the top of this delightful hill, from Westmeston and from Plumpton, but you would be wise to have a careful look at them first before setting your car at them. With a wet surface it would be prudent to admire the beacon from a distance.

From Plumpton there are two ways of reaching Ashdown Forest, which I think may rightly be called part of the Brighton hinterland. You can either run due north over North Common and past Sheffield Park to Danehill, or you can go through Ditchling along the Haywards Heath road, which takes you over agreeable open spaces. You join the other road to the forest just beyond Danehill, and I think that on the whole it is the better way. For one reason, you go through Lindfield, which is certainly one of the most attractive villages in Sussex.

At Danehill you are on the main road to East Grinstead, by way of Wych Cross and Forest Row. This is a particularly pleasant stage of the run, but it can be delightfully

varied by taking the right-hand turn at Chelwood Gate and making for Nutley and, two miles farther on, joining the Uckfield road at Camphill. Here you climb up to something like seven hundred feet across the heart of the forest, and you will be indeed hard to please if you do not at once decide to return again and again. Another two miles farther on take the left-hand road to Wych Cross and keep straight on past Leasheath to Fonthill, where you turn back towards Brighton past Kingscote Station, South Hill, Ardingly, and Lindfield. Here, for the sake of variety, bear to the left and take the road to Chailey, which will bring you down to Cooksbridge Station, when you can either reach Brighton by way of Lewes Racecourse or by the road under Ditchling Beacon as you came out.

That is one of the best runs through the Brighton country, but it can be most pleasantly extended in this way. When you have reached Poynings again at the foot of the South Down canyon, you carry straight on under the hill-side to Upper Beeding, Washington, Storrington, and so by way of Amberley Station to the cross-roads at the corner of Arundel Park. Here you turn down to the right, down Bury Hill as far as Fittleworth Station, where you again turn to the left past Coates, and once more at the next but one. This takes you over Duncton Hill and up again on to the Downs. Your way home lies through Eartham, Slindon, Arundel, and Shoreham.

This Sussex cruise is essentially one for winter days, not only because the roads are apt to be overcrowded in the summer, but because the Downs themselves look so very much better under winter skies. If you are lucky enough in your wanderings to have a good sunset or two, you will discover several new facts about the limitless colours beech woods and turf can take on under those red rays. And you see woods and hills, rivers and the sea, all a background for the Weald. It is pure England.

CHAPTER III

SUSSEX

For the owner of a car nearly every English county is an unplumbed treasure-heap. There is no end to the exquisite journeys awaiting the patient motorist north, south, east, and west. Each of the counties which have been spared the worst visitations of industry—and one or two of those as well, which haven't—has, unknown to the majority of road-wanderers from other "sides," scores, hundreds of miles of new roads to explore. Winter, summer, spring, autumn, it makes little difference when you go out to find fresh places. Except when such things as blizzards are to be expected it does not matter in what month you take the road. This England and its astonishing climate are open all the year round to the sensible motor-cruiser.

This much, at least, can be said of nearly every one of the fifty-two counties, but there are, among the general number, several specially fortunate ones in which the wanderer who thinks he knows them by heart, to the last furlong, can always find something new, some entirely fresh aspect of familiar

places and things. Of these, I would put that wonderful Kent–Sussex border very high in the list. Take a good half-inch map and look at the close network of roads and lanes which cover the face of the earth between Maidstone. Ashford, Robertsbridge, Tonbridge, and Wrotham. Without more than an occasional crossing of a main road, you could find a month of daily explorations among the by-ways alone, and then find that you had not done the half of them. It is a wonderful place for the leisurely motorist, and these cruises are sketched for no others.

A specially attractive border week-end drive, away from main roads for nearly every mile of it, can be made between Maidstone and Battle. I take these two places for no particular reason save that Maidstone is easily reached from London, Canterbury, and Guildford, and is therefore a convenient landmark for roadfarers in at least three counties, and Battle lies in the middle of some of the best part of Sussex. It scarcely matters at all whence you start or what your objective may be, so long as you avoid the big seaside towns. What you seek and find in Kent and Sussex is a day in ancient lanes which lead you past place after place whose name is found in the history of the land as far back as history may be trusted, and sometimes farther. Little places, like farms or patches of land where farms once stood, bearing the names of families long ago vanished, remembered to-day only on worn gravestones in half a hundred parish churchyards; or commons, those rich legacies of ancient England; or places of rude justice and summary execution. They are older than the towns, some of them, and England is a very old place.

Here is the run. Leave Maidstone by the Hastings road, turning off it a mile or so outside the town, to the left, for Headcorn. Almost at once you come to the ancient names. As you begin to climb the rise out of the Medway Valley you come to Five Wents and, after topping the rise

by Sutton Valence, to Farthing Green. A mile to your right is the quite incredible Devil's Den. Hereabout you are in what Nicholas Culpeper called a riverine country; a green, flat, lush countryside, much watered by the Sherway, the Hammer, the Beult, and such streams as are rudely called ditches by "foreigners." Ditches they may be, in the eyes of such folk, but they mean a good deal to the people who live with them. They have important relations farther south, such as the Brede, the Tilligham and the immense Rother. Reduce your outlook to the scale of this miniature, and you will be glad to meet these friendly streams.

To Rat's Castle Inn your road runs, after Headcorn, but if you are looking for a name which must be unique, turn off to the left a mile back and make for London Beach. This road will carry you to Tenterden as well as the Rat's Castle one. From Tenterden to very ancient Rye, through the Isle of Oxney and by Iden, you run through the peaceful Rother Levels, with Weyland's Marsh (the maps have it Walland, and, for all I know, the Royal Geographical Society and the Ordnance, but it must be the Smith's marsh and none other) on your left, stretching out to Dungeness, and you will like it all very much.

From Rye take the Udimore road to Broad Oak and Brede, where you turn off abruptly to the right and make for Battle by way of Sedlescombe.

On your road north again, by Robertsbridge, you will be well advised to turn off at Silver Hill and get as close as you can to Bodiam Castle, whence, if you do not mind a pretty rough lane, you can reach the Benenden road to Maidstone, or Cranbrook, Goudhurst and Tunbridge Wells. The lane was certainly ancient the last time I used it, and it might be better, in wet weather, to retrace your wheel-tracks as far as Bodiam itself, and then turn to the right to Hawkhurst and Hartley Row. If you discover a distaste for the Goudhurst road (it is popular on fine days) you can,

with advantage, turn off at Hartley Row and make a detour through Cranbrook, joining the Maidstone road about three miles beyond Marden.

Hereabouts, chief among the border treasures, is the corner of East Sussex which Mr. Kipling has made as familiar as their own gardens to the children of the English-reading world.

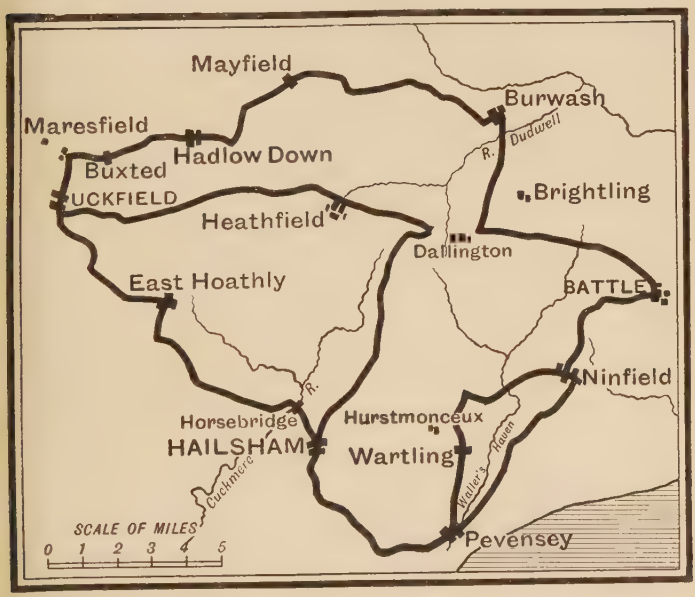
Puck's country—where Dan and Una heard and saw everything, though it had happened three thousand years ago, and we hear and see it in *Puck of Pook's Hill* and *Rewards and Fairies*—is the ideal spot for a quiet ramble by car on a short day, almost as much for those who have missed so much in not reading those matchless books, as for us who know them by heart.

To us every mile of every lane, every hill and copse and ancient farmstead are private property, our own for years. Books make scenery live, but none so vividly as the Puck stories. To those who have yet to make their gorgeous discovery those woods and fields which lie between Uckfield and Battle, Robertsbridge and the Pevensey Levels are manifestly the places where every sort of wonderful thing must have happened, of which quite obviously great tales must have been written and told.

If you have no better use for your time than measuring distances on the map you will find that, on the map, Puck's country is of no great extent. I daresay a fifty-mile drive will take you round its frontiers, passing through Uckfield, Battle, and Robertsbridge, but that is to get an entirely wrong calculation. Whatever the map may say, the country of charms and spells is just as big as you like to make it—at least as big as it seems to you when Puck has introduced you to his catholic circle of acquaintances. That is one reason why you should take care to begin your wanderings betimes on short days. Distance is a figure of speech and so is time, as you will find. Pevensey may be only

nine miles from Battle, but it will take you a long time to get from one to the other when you see the castle which the Old Men held, where they dangled Fulke in the well, where Weland and a few others landed.

If you are from London way, having taken the Eastbourne road, you turn to the left at Maresfield and enter



the land of true stories by Buxted. Near here is a house and farm, hills, spinneys, and a little river, in which it is perfectly plain that Dan and Una lived. It was my immense privilege to stay here, and I recognised it the moment I looked out of my window. Everything was there, from Three Cows to the brook on which the dinghy "Daisy" (alias "Golden Hind") set out to discover the North Cape, but, owing to the warmth of the day, made it the Amazon and the Sources of the Nile instead. A quarter of a mile

across the meadow was Far Wood, or Volaterrae, and on the other side Willow Shaw, where grown-ups were not allowed unless brought, except Queen Elizabeth.

The road from here onwards needs, like the Sources of the Nile, careful navigation. You bear to the left first beyond Hadlow Down and keep on to Mayfield. Keep to the right through the village and follow the very tricky by-road which crosses the little valley of the Rother to Burwash. Here you strike the main road, but immediately after Burwash turn south to Wood's Corner. Here you are in Dallington Forest, where Sir Richard Dalyngridge lived with his Lady Aclueva in the manor de Aquila gave him, and you will find it will be a long time before you can go on your way. Just before Wood's Corner the road carries you to Brightling Beacon, whence the Faun saw the Pirates land, who brought Weland's image in their thirty-two-oar galley, and where the monastery of Hugh the Novice stood. At the cross-roads bear to the left for Netherfield and Battle.

From Battle you have two ways of reaching Pevensey, by Ninfield and the lane across the Levels, or by Windmill Hill and Wartling. I prefer the latter, as it takes you past Hurstmonceux Castle and the road is generally in rather better condition. Pevensey is an outstanding example of the kind of famous place which is best visited in winter. In summer its admirers are more than embarrassing in their numbers, and you must be a really toughened sightseer to remain undiscouraged. It is difficult to think of Kadmiel and his gold cast into the sea, and Adah, wife of Elias, who wept and was an odious woman, and the two hundred pieces of gold it cost to alter the Fortieth Law of Magna Charta, unless you have some solitude. But it is the only place in Puck's country where there is any chance of the enchantment being broken by crowds.

On the homeward turn, north over the Levels, you bear

to the right at Stone Cross and come to Hailsham. Here, if you have daylight enough left, you would do best to follow the road to the hills again by Rushlake Green, joining the Heathfield road at Three Cups Corner, a mile or so west of Dallington, and find the Eastbourne-Maresfield road at Uckfield. This gives you a last and beautiful glimpse of the best part of the country and is more than worth the detour. The road runs through Heathfield, Cross in Hand, and Framfield. If you have forgotten the time, as is almost certain, and darkness has caught you, your direct way from Hailsham lies by Horsebridge and East Hoathly.

. . . . .

Next after fog, snow is unanimously regarded as the deadliest thing that can happen to you on the road. It does not need those grim tales of accidents which appear in the papers to bring it well home to you how effectively the horrible stuff can paralyse locomotion. Five minutes' experience on a slippery road will convince the most confirmed doubter that the proper place for snow is the upper halves of mountains or anywhere where wheels are not used in winter. It is picturesque even at close range, and it induces a kind of traditional hilarity in otherwise sensible folk, sedulously fostered by newspaper photographs. But it is no sort of adornment to English cities, and there is nothing, except the special sports and amusements which owe their existence to it, which it does not spoil.

Its beauty, however, is not to be denied, and—a point which is particularly alluring to the wanderer by car—the changes it makes on the face of familiar country. It can be dangerous in the extreme, even for drivers with many years' experience, but in certain conditions and temperatures it can be safely faced, and it is always more than worth while, on a winter's day of firm snow and bright sun, to take the car out over country you know best under summer

skies with fully dressed trees and flowered fields. Not only will you be hard put to it to recognise familiar things, but you will find a hundred new ones. You will find it remarkably easy to lose your way on roads you know well in June, and sign-posts you have never yet noticed will be anxiously consulted.

Your success in snow motoring is governed by two inflexible conditions. You must choose a day when the snow is of that quality which allows the tyres to grip, and you must avoid steep hills. The latter rule, however, is no disadvantage, for this reason. In sticking to the valleys you see the best of any country, which is, of course, the hills, in their new beauty and at their best. Snow is not much of an adornment to the plains, of no matter what kind they may be, and to appreciate it you must see it above you lying smoothly on a hillside, deep drifted in the ditches, piled high above overhanging banks, making magic Christmas trees of every fir. Seen at a distance from a hill-top it is, to be candid, gloomy stuff, but from below it is very decorative.

You have, then, to find hills which you can skirt, but need not climb. And if you are out only for the day they must not be too far away. Sunday is not the best day in the week for getting farm help to pull you out of drifts into which you may have incautiously sunk, or up ice-coated lanes. These considerations sound rather damping, but it should always be borne in mind, when you are taking a snowy road, that the conditions are constantly changing, and while you may be as firm on your tyres on one stretch of road as you would be on a summer's day, you may find it unpleasantly slippery half a mile farther on.

Here is the course of a wonderful snow-motoring Sunday I spent last winter which I can heartily recommend. Having an abiding affection for the hills of the Sevenoaks country, I went down to have a look at my very good friends Ide Hill, Toys Hill, Hanging Bank, and Westerham. I left

London by way of Beckenham, Hayes Common, and Farnborough, leaving the main Sevenoaks road at Pratts Bottom, where I turned to the right. Up to this point the snow had behaved ideally in being displayed to view on all sides, but not on the road itself. As, however, I began to climb up to Knockholt Pound, one of the most beautiful places in Kent, whether under snow or not, I noticed that one or two people standing about on the road smiled in a slightly superior manner as I faced the rise. A minute later I discovered why. There were three inches of hard snow on the road.

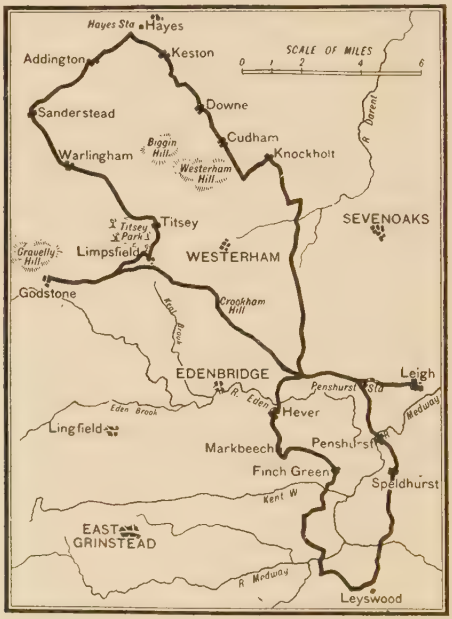
It was, however, of the sticky and not the slippery kind, and during my subsequent four or five miles' wandering, from the Beacon to Chevening Cross, where the view of the snow-covered hills by Ashdown Forest was superb, I never suffered that heart-stopping feeling produced by a front-wheel skid.

After Dunton Green I wandered down to Riverhead and so on to the Sevenoaks road and through the town. I carried on by the Tonbridge road to the top of River Hill, where I turned sharp to the right, where a signpost points the way to Ide Hill. This road was really exquisite, and though I came across patches of snow here and there, none of them was of the slippery kind. At the top of Ide Hill I again looked out over what looked like half Kent. There was not a cloud in the sky, the air was of a diamond quality, and the sky was as radiant, if not as blue, as its fellow over the Mediterranean. The shadows on the snow were of that wonderful blue which you usually only see among the high hills, and the deep silence which lay over everything made you think of the place as a range of real mountains.

After Ide Hill I turned south, past Chittenden, and then sharp right and north again, past Obriss, up Toys Hill and through that exquisite stretch of highland where are Scords, the Chart, the Philippines, and Vines Gate. I came down on to the Westerham road at Brasted, where I turned left

for Westerham, and finished a memorable day of snow motoring by climbing its famous hill. You will notice that the mileage is insignificant, being not more than eighty, but as it was packed with beauty it was an ideal day's run.

This run will serve to remind the London cruiser in



search of unhackneyed winter day's drives, with or without the decoration of snow, that there are few better places than the unfrequented commons which lie to the south-east. Between Croydon and Sevenoaks, Chislehurst and Godstone, there are some of the pleasantest sort of uplands for him to explore. To anyone who is not familiar with these commons, their situation as seen on a mere map looks suburban to a degree. It does not seem possible that those few square miles, hemmed in as they are on at least two

sides by the less cheerful fringes of South London, could be anything better than a kind of recreation ground.

A delightful surprise awaits him. Keston Common, and the roads round it, is, on a fine day, one of the most attractive spots within a hundred miles of London. The altitude above the sea is quite moderate, something between three and four hundred feet, but there are many places here and there, on this and on Hayes Common, whence you get such superb views north and east that you would be inclined to estimate the height as at least twice as great as it is. There are delightful little woods on the top of Hayes Common, especially along the road between Hayes itself and Locksbottom, which lies on the main Bromley–Sevenoaks road. It is a place of silver birches, gorse, and pines, very gracious round the Keston Ponds. You may be only twelve miles from Charing Cross, but, except when your eye falls unfortunately on the Crystal Palace, some six miles away, you would find it hard to believe that you were anywhere near London, or for that matter any town. It is undoubtedly the nearest real country you are likely to find.

A cruise round the London commons is a thing to be undertaken in a very leisurely spirit. It is the kind of drive that you plan with great care, and then change the plan every half-hour. This is all to the good, as it is really not of very much consequence which of the roads you take over and round the commons. All are beautiful and refreshingly empty of traffic. You can double and turn back on your wheel-tracks as often as you please without ever growing weary of the miniature hill scenery. The commons themselves are small, and really form only a nucleus of the day's drive, which should be arranged so as to circle them as well as to cross them.

Here is a way—one of half a dozen—which will show you the best of this surprising London country. Taking Beckenham as your starting point, you go through Park

Langley to Hayes, and begin the gentle climb up to Hayes Common. Half way between Hayes and Keston, take the right-hand road which leads you past Coney Hall Farm to Addington and Sanderstead. Here you will again be delighted at the absolutely unspoilt look of things. Houses, fields, woods, and hills are just the same as they must have been three hundred years ago, when they were ten times as far from the town as they are now.

At Sanderstead you bear to the left after Selsdon Park and follow the newly re-built road through Warlingham to the top of Titsey Hill. This road gradually rises through very charming wooded country to something not far off nine hundred feet above the sea, and in this connection it is perhaps as well to remember not to do your London Commons cruise if there is any chance of fog, as the top of the North Down just here has a particularly evil reputation for thick weather. At the top of Titsey Hill bear to the left and follow a narrow, winding, and exceedingly picturesque road, which is a remnant of the Pilgrims' Way. About three miles farther on you will see on your left one of the most ideal sites for a small house imaginable. The slope of the hill faces due south, with a magnificent view over the valley towards Westerham, and it is one of those peculiarly fortunate places on which the sun shines all day long.

Just after this delectable spot the road crosses the main road from Westerham to Bromley about half way up the famous Westerham Hill. This crossing should be approached with considerable caution, as cars making the ascent of Westerham Hill do not as a rule loiter at this particular spot. The Pilgrims' Way leads you on to Hog-trough Hill, where you leave it, and, turning to the left, make for Cudham and Green Street Green, where you touch the Sevenoaks road for a mile. A mile short of Farnborough, take the turning to the left which leads you again along the southern edge of Keston Common to the

Westerham road by Keston Court. Turn to the right here, and a mile farther on to the left through Keston and so back to Hayes and Beckenham.

If time allows, it is well worth enlarging this run in the following way. Instead of turning off down the Pilgrims' Way at the top of Titsey Hill, follow the road down the latter past Limpsfield, up over Limpsfield Common (a very worthy rival to the other two), to Crockham Hill, up that picturesque slope, and over Crockham Hill Common to Westerham. Here you turn to the right on to the Sevenoaks road and follow it as far as Brasted, where you turn to the left, and in a couple of miles come to the Pilgrims' Way and join, as before, the road to Cudham and Green Street Green. There are pretty steep hills round about Cudham and Downe, but nothing to give you any anxiety. On the whole the roads are excellent, the only stretches which may be indifferent being a few miles round Cudham.

CHAPTER IV

KENT

That part of Kent which ends up with the North Foreland and the cliffs between Dover and Deal is one of the most mysterious parts of England. At no time are you ever over five hundred feet above sea-level, and usually you are at less than four hundred, yet you see everything round you for miles, as if you were at least a thousand feet above the Channel. There are stretches of the roads between Ashford and Canterbury and Sarre and Sandwich where, so far as views are concerned, you might be in genuine hill country instead of, as is the case, almost at sea-level, at the foot of the last hills of England. Particularly striking is this inexplicable affair on Cooting Downs, the last seaward slopes of those last hills of England. At the end of a few minutes hereabouts you are convinced that that invariably correct instrument, your aneroid, has been bewitched.

All the country in the triangle between Canterbury, Deal, and Hythe is proper country for real exploring and for rewarding surprises. You get valleys in the Downs above Dover which might be in Wiltshire; woods and high-hedged,

winding lanes which belong properly to Devonshire. All those little roads among the last hills of England are really the backs of the "white cliffs of Albion," but it is only when you leave the comparative altitudes of the down heads and cross to Barham Downs Road that you find out what an effect is made out of very little by the last hills.

The best way to make a leisurely day's drive of the white cliff country, starting, say, from Canterbury, is to make first for Sandwich and Deal, where, if you are properly constituted, you will certainly envy the distinguished occupant his tenancy of Deal Castle, with its huge espalier pear-trees climbing from the moat's bottom up the ancient walls, and the patriarchal fig-trees by the drawbridge. At Walmer, about two miles farther on, you leave the main Dover road, and aim for East Langdon and Guston, two little hamlets which will come as a delightful surprise to you. They are only two or three miles from the hideous town of Dover, but they are well protected from any urban influences by the backs of those white cliffs.

After Guston, you turn north to Whitfield, west again to Ewell, just short of which you cross the Canterbury–Dover road and keep straight on to Alkham, another beautiful village in the last place you would expect to find one. All this road runs through an unobtrusive valley and has a delightful air of seeming to hide itself. You are still little more than an hour's walk from either Folkestone or Dover, but there is nothing to remind you of either. The road itself is narrow and winding, and considerable care should be taken in rounding the numerous bends.

Then comes Hawkinge, a few hundred yards farther on the Folkestone–Canterbury road, just north of St. Thomas's Well. Here you turn to the right to a place called Uphill, and along a straight road by Swingfield Minnis. Just here you are crossing the very last spur of the range of the Downs which stretch, with only two interruptions, between

Folkestone and Guildford. After Broome Park you take the second to the right, which brings you on to Cooting Downs, where you see that astonishing spread of country. You are not very high up, but the air you breathe there is nimble, fresh and clean as the seas themselves which press upon the three coasts of Kent. The road keeps on across the last edge of Barham Downs, to Wingham, where, if Canterbury is your goal, you turn to the left. If time is no object, however, it is well worth while turning off the Canterbury road at Littlebourne, and, crossing the main road again, make for Street End, where you reach the Stone Street, a fine specimen of Roman road. Turn south along this again and follow it to Lyminge, where you bear to the left and make for Canterbury once more, either by way of Stelling Minnis or by Wingmore and so on to the Barham Downs road.

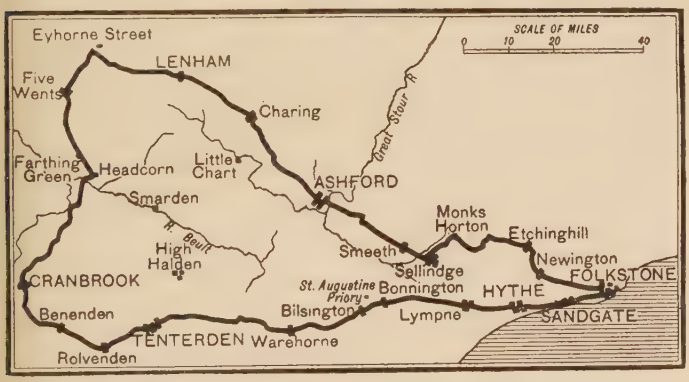
This day's wander in the country of the white cliffs is a leisurely affair of narrow roads, with many turnings, and much doubling back and forth. It is essentially a cruise for picnic baskets, for cameras, and for a total disregard of time. There is nothing fashionable about those little villages hiding behind the cliffs, and, except in their high season, you will not be disturbed by chars-à-bancs or, for that matter, by much other traffic.

There are few more attractive roads in England than those which run parallel with the sea and above it, and when road wanderers are in search of a lazy winter drive I always think they can find country of unusual charm along the secondary roads running east and west between the Foreland and Portsmouth.

The seaboard roads themselves must have been delightful once upon a time, but owing to the publicity they have received from charabancs, and, for that matter, from innumerable private cars, the coast roads like those past Dymchurch, New Romney, and between Rye and Hastings, and so to

Brighton, lose much of their charm except in very foul weather. Farther inland, however, there are numbers of delightful drives to be picked out with the help of a first-class map.

Here is a road, a great favourite of mine, which I can warmly recommend to those who are wintering at Folkestone and in the neighbourhood. Take the beach road to Sandgate and Hythe and from there follow the third-class



road to Lympne Castle. Although you are only a matter of two or three miles from Hythe, the moment you get close to the castle, by Quathill, you understand the character of the road. It runs on a kind of shelf well above Romney Marsh, and although its height just by Lympne is insignificant, less than three hundred and fifty feet above the sea, you have a view out over the Channel which must on a clear day carry your eye as far as fifty miles. It is a road on which you seldom meet anything or anybody, but you are accompanied constantly by wild things. The scenery is varied along here, in the way that only English scenery can vary mile by mile. There are glorious open fields spread over the broad sweep of the hills, with sheltering spinneys on their north and east corners, and from their

heartening expanse your eye travels to some of the nicest houses, churches, and buildings you will find in many a long day's march.

As you drive through Bonnington, Bilsington (between which St. Augustine's Priory, or what is left of it, lies on your right), and Warehorne, here and there you get astonishing views on both sides of the road, and still, although you are slowly dropping all the time, you have the impression of being able to see out all over the South of England. This is, I think, one of England's most precious qualities, unrivalled anywhere in Europe, but I have never seen it so marked as on this delightful stretch of odd bits of side roads which, strung together, make a kind of backbone of the south-east of England. The whole thing has a charm which it is impossible to define. It is English of England, and yet here and there odd buildings stand up—windmills and black-timbered farmhouses—which somehow remind you of country on the other side of the Channel to which you would be hard set to put a name. Kent is full of such odd corners, and some of the best of them lie along here.

Some of the place-names are delightful. Peartree Farm, for example, Stonecross, Sugarloaf, Susan's Hill, Snargate, and yet another example of French Hill and French Hay. The last you see on your left just before you reach Tenterden, and beyond French Hill there lies another of England's landlocked islands, the Isle of Oxney, which seems to owe its rank to the streamlet called Highknock Canal, the River Rother, and a less picturesque water known as Reading Sewer.

Tenterden is a mercifully much-missed beauty spot of South England. I have driven through it at the height of the tourist season, and noticed with selfish delight that very few people stop in it even to see its remarkable church. It is a little town with a broad street cutting it in half, bordered by fine trees, which throw real shade in summer time, and

it is full from end to end of most ancient houses. It seems to be the most fitting turning-point of the day's drive. Ancient Tenterden is exactly in the right place, and if you have caught the spirit of the odd little road I have described you will see that it would be out of place anywhere else.

The best way back to Folkestone is to carry on west-

wards through Rolvenden, Benenden, to Cranbrook, where you turn north and, keeping a sharp look out for the various right and wrong turnings, make for Headcorn, and, leaving Farthing Green on your left, cross the southern spurs of the North Down by Five Wents, and join the Maidstone–Ashford road by Eyhorne Street. Very few main roads, alas, are anything but hideous in these days of patent

surfaces, petrol stations, and by-passes, but the last part of the Folkestone road through Ashford is not intolerable. A pleasanter way of finishing the day's run is to turn to the left just before Sellinge and make for Monks Horton, and by various by-paths come down past Etchinghill to Newington and so into Folkestone.

The northern part of Kent is not as a rule looked upon as a possible motor touring ground, chiefly because the main road to the Channel ports, through Maidstone, is frankly dull, while the other, through Rochester and Sittingbourne, is very little used except by those who live near it. Between these two rather uninteresting highways, however, there lie the North Downs, among which a day can be very pleasantly spent by the London motorist in search of fairly empty by-paths.

It is anything but straight going to make the tour of the North Downs, and that is certainly one of their principal attractions. To make a thorough tour of them—and it is well worth while—they must be crossed and recrossed at least half a dozen times in a crow's-flight distance of some twenty miles. There is very little level work, and your car is generally either climbing or dropping. The rewards for your patience, however, are well worth having, as, apart from the beauty of the Downs themselves, the views you get north and south over the lower reaches of the Swale and London River, and over the Sussex Weald, are among some of the best to be found in the Home Counties.

The London motorist should take Maidstone as his point of departure for the North Downs cruise and make first for Boxley, which is a particularly lovely little village at the foot of the Downs themselves. A stiff climb with a zig-zag bend in it brings you up to over six hundred feet altitude on the road to Bredhurst, which runs through magnificent woods. From here you follow it straight down to a point a little west of Hartlip Hill, on the Rochester–Sittingbourne

road, and turn to the right again at Key Street, on the road to Stockbury, Hucking, and the Pilgrims' Way, where it runs just north-east of Lenham. A couple of miles farther on turn to the left again and climb up by Witchling to Doddington and Newnham, where you aim north once more for the main road at Green Street. This run can be varied by making for Thornham, after Bredhurst, and leaving out Stockbury, going east to Hollingbourne.

Between Newnham and Green Street you run through orchards, which at the right time of the year most resemble that incredible thing, a happy rubber plantation. The trees are planted on the same deadly mathematical plan, and here and there they seem to be endless, like their far eastern relations. They smile, however, instead of weeping. At Green Street you are once more on the northern main road, which you follow to a point just short of Faversham, where you turn off south again past Belmont Park and down towards Charing. At the top of Charing Hill turn to the left and immediately afterwards bear right to Challock Lees, where you take the road to Wye.

Wye is a grossly neglected beauty village, in which are timbered houses fairly rivalling those of far more famous Kentish hamlets. It lies in the narrow valley between the last two spurs of the North Downs, and it will come upon the stranger as one of the most charming surprises in a very pleasant day's run.

From Wye you can begin to think about going home either by crossing Wye Downs, and by very narrow and humble roads the last part of the North Downs as far as the Canterbury–Folkestone road, or you can drop south along the edge of the Downs off Brabourne, through rich pasture land spreading out in a heartening expanse, to the Ashford–Hythe road, whence it is an easy run back to town. There is not a dull mile in the whole of this meandering cruise, and the lover of quaint place-names will have plenty of material for his pocket-book. You will pass, for example, Chestnut Street and Morning Dawn, Solomon's Temple, and even New York, in the first half of the day's run, while farther east you come across Monkery, Old Wives Lees, Mountain Street, and the more familiar Mockbeggar. All this part of the world, south of the Downs, is rich in quaint names, and another twenty miles or so added to the run will show you places like Pikefish, another Mockbeggar, Farthing Green, the Quarter, and one of the most beautiful of all, Shadoxhurst.

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If you are looking for by-ways, and you are not afraid of real exploring, with all its chances of having to retrace your wheel-tracks, you cannot do better than set out for the Kentish hills and valleys. You will find them pretty much as they have always been—or, at any rate, since the Conqueror landed. Titles go far back among the farms in Sevenoaks Weald, round Westerham, and by Hever and Speldhurst, and names of even the smallest corners do

not change in a few centuries. You will see things as they were when Senlac began a new page in their history.

It is not easy to keep on the right road when you are looking for old Kent and its by-ways. You must have a very good map and read it most of the time you are tacking to and fro in search of this or that hill or lane or brook. That is part of the high adventure. Where else in the whole wide world must you blink at a big scale map so that you may not lose your way within thirty miles of the capital? That you will lose your way is quite certain, and not once only. It would be wise to make up your mind before you start not to lose your composure because you have, for the twentieth time, overshot the right turning. Your day will probably be spent in doing it, and if you are ruffled by these things you had best avoid old Kent. Cultivate calm and you will realise that for every mistake you make in picking out a likely road you will be a heavy gainer. For you will have to stop and go back or turn round, and every time you do any of these things the spell of this ancient land will close more tightly about you. You will begin to see how much you are missing.

Having your excellent map before you (Bartholomew's half-inch will serve you well) make your starting point Hayes Station, some ten miles from Victoria, and follow the road to Keston. About a mile or so farther on take the left fork, where an unusually obliging sign-post shows you the way to Downe, and enter immediately upon by-ways. Read your map as a binnacle. It is straight going as far as Downe and the excessively steep hill which takes you to Cudham Church. It may be that this notorious climb, if you are new to it, will cause you misgivings about what lies before you; but there is no need to worry. The hills on Kentish by-ways are certainly abrupt, but they are none of them long, and their surface is almost invariably good.

Then comes Horn Green and, a mile on, a sharp turn

to the left for Knockholt, followed at once by another to the right past Chevening Park, where you begin to drop down from the slopes of the North Down into the mile-wide valley which separates it from Ide Hill. Your landmark here is Sundridge, whence you begin at once to climb up Ide Hill itself. It is all densely wooded hereabouts. Indeed, ever since you left Cudham you have tunnelled through beech woods, and it is only when you get down towards the River Eden that you come out into open land once more. Call a halt at the top of Ide Hill and look at the Weald below you, lying out as far as you can see, and at the little hill-shoulder on your left. On the map it is called Hanging Bank, and you will agree that it is just a perfect place for a perfect house to be built. Look at your map again and find Crockham Hill, to the west. Just about where you see Froghole there is an almost exact reduplicate of this particular side of Ide Hill. Does ancient England repeat herself so minutely anywhere else? The resemblance is uncanny.

From Ide Hill you drop down to the railway—a dull but useful landmark in a paradise of bewildering paths, and turning to the left make for Penshurst Station, Penshurst and Speldhurst. Here you are in the heart of that kind of England which still endures, the England of gracious houses and great timber and unhurried days. The Eden winds a leisurely course through fat meadows, where pedigree cattle stand knee-deep in the brookside grasses, their comfortable rotundities reflected in the stream. There is nothing like it in the world.

After leaving the fat cows you have Adventure before you. Past Groombridge, if you do not turn meekly to the right, you come to a silly notice which informs you, with much inaccuracy, that the road is impracticable for motors. It is not. It, the notice, refers, apparently, to a steep hill down. Go down it with due precautions. It is

a steep and, if not taken seriously enough, a dangerous hill. So are upwards of a hundred other hills in England, but nobody has thought of calling them impracticable. Unluckily for them, perhaps, for it may be that the silly notice has served to keep the tiny valley below Leyswood free from a surfeit of visitors. It is an exquisite spot, and you should really be grateful to that foolish notice-board. For it is the sort of place which sees few people.

The way home lies through more delightful winding lanes, past Highfield Park, Markbeech, and Hever. You come again to the dull but helpful railway, close to where you crossed it before, and take the road to Crockham. If you want to see for yourself the resemblance between Hanging Bank, on Ide Hill, and Froghole, on Crockham Hill, take the right-hand road to Westerham. If you are content to believe me, bear to the left to Limpsfield. Both roads are beautiful, but the way home by Titsey and Sanderstead is better than by Westerham and Biggin Hill. Both roads meet again at Hayes Station.

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Just off one of the busiest, most crowded, noisiest, and certainly most unpleasant highways in the United Kingdom, almost, but not quite, within earshot of its thunderous traffic, lies an island of peace. An island where, except at its far and least attractive end, cars, charabancs, and the merrymakers they bring, are only occasionally seen or heard, an island of empty, winding roads and little hills from whose wooded crests some of the best of England is seen across a gleaming narrow of her protecting seas.

It is Sheppey, and the uproarious road which you leave to reach it is the Dover road, better known on fine Sundays as the road to Margate. It would be difficult during the holiday months to find a place more delightful for the London motorist than this sequestered islet. Week after

week it gets more difficult for that London motorist to find a quiet spot in which to drive his car and look upon woods and fields and rivers in comparative peace. Later on in the year the riches of the Home Counties will be restored to their normal quiet, and week-end cruises about the hills of Sussex, Surrey, and Buckinghamshire will once more become real motoring. Till these are released from the holiday crowds the island of Sheppey makes a delightful refuge.

Looked at on the map, the Isle of Wight is only twice as big as Sheppey, but when you have driven your car across the Swale River at Queen's Bridge and have entered upon the adventure of exploring this very peaceful spot, you will find that from the point of view of your car the Isle of Wight is the size of a continent in comparison. It will make no difference at all. Sheppey is like Holland, because you cannot go fast in it; you do not want to, and, if you did, you ought to be forbidden by law to cross that exciting bridge. The moment your tyres reach that delightful winding road which crosses the Neatscourt Marshes you slow down almost to walking pace. At once, without warning, the air, the very sky, is different. The breath of the sea blows over the cornfields and you have forgotten the abominations of the Dover road.

Reduced to cold print, there are very few places to go to in Sheppey. Leave out Queenborough and Sheerness (always supposing naval dockyards have no attraction for you), and your drive through the island is confined to a straggling circuit of twenty miles. That has got nothing whatever to do with the joy you will assuredly find along its empty, tidy little roads. There is a town with a church which must be, I should imagine, as old as any in the kingdom. Minster, perched on a little hill-top in approved medieval manner, has an abbey dating from the twelfth century. Unlike other monuments of this period, there is

much left to be seen. The inscriptions on the flagstones of that ancient church (which has two naves and two chancels), and the effigies, which, incidentally, look exactly like the cuts in Gardiner's School History come to life, will keep you fascinated for a long time. There are not many places left where you can actually see things that were there in the reign of Cœur de Lion or Edward I, or even Henry VIII.

When you have found out all you can about the knights and earls and barons who died about nine centuries ago, you take the road west past Pigtail Corner to Warden and Warden Point. At high tide you look out here over the outer mouth of the Thames over Oaze Deep and at the Nore Light, and at such pleasantly-named aids to navigation as the Middle Spaniard Buoy and the Columbine. All the shipping afloat in due time goes past you here—or so it seems—and it is a place where a whole day can most happily be spent in doing nothing except watching the greatest waterway in the world.

After Warden you begin to complete your tour of the island by going south to Leysdown, and then east again through Eastchurch back to the Neatscourt Marshes. All along this road, which is only some six miles in length, you will have views of the Kentish hills to the south, which show them to you with an entirely new beauty. In fact, that is one of the chief charms of Sheppey, that you see the best of the North Downs in the best way.

The way to reach Sheppey from London is to follow the Folkestone road by way of the Wrotham by-pass, through Maidstone, and over the exquisite hill road by Detling to Key Street and Bobbing, just west of Sittingbourne. As you head for Sheppey, whether you have come by the Detling road or from Canterbury, or Chatham, you will not fail to revel in the contrast of that suffocating highway, rendered hideous by bellowings and the incessant rasp of exhaust

and gears, with the abiding peace of the little island which saw the Dutch fleet sail by on a wind that blew uneasiness even through the windows of Charles II—a very proper spot for a tired Londoner on a Sunday.

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One of the best drives in the Home Counties, you will find, is the succession of roads you must follow when you try to follow the Pilgrims' Way, between Canterbury and, say, Farnham. There is not very much left, I believe, which is readily identifiable by archæologists, but here and there you are not only within easy walking distance of where the pilgrims travelled, but your own road follows their footsteps. It is true that what is left of the Pilgrims' Way appeals more to the eye of faith than to anything else, and that much of what you can actually see is little more than a trace of what was once one of the most romantic of paths. Yet the line those sturdy medievals chose to follow was in some places so uncompromisingly Roman in its directness and its scorn of steep gradients, and in others so vague, turning aside for no obvious purpose, that, with a good map in the car, your day with the pilgrims will be one which you will want to repeat again and again.

The start, I think, is better made for those who are not well up in medieval geography from the Canterbury end, as there are surer traces of it here than near Winchester. You leave Canterbury by the Faversham road and first meet the Pilgrims' Way just by Harbledown, where a lane to the left claims the right to be the original path. If you do not care to explore it, you can go on along the Watling Street to a mile short of Dunkirk, and then get on to the Canterbury–Ashford road near Chartham. When you get near Pope Street you are once more on the scent, and a little farther on, at Boughton Aluph, you meet the Way and can actually follow it pretty well as far as a mile or so

beyond Charing. Here its traces leave the vicinity of the highway for some time, but it is not difficult to guess where those splendid and tattered cavalcades passed. I believe it went as far north-west as Hollingbourne.

Your next objective is Wrotham, which you reach through Hollingbourne itself, Thornham, Detling, and Maidstone. If you turn off the Maidstone–Wrotham road at Leybourne and strike north to Snodland, you will meet the Way again, and if you do not care to follow it on foot you can drive parallel with it through Downs Wood just to the north.

From here the Way runs comparatively clearly to Titsey, a distance of sixteen miles. The first two miles out of Wrotham consist of a lane, and then merely faint traces, but at St. Clere it becomes a genuine road and continues as such through Otford, Chevening Cross, round Chevening Park, across the main Westerham–London road, half-way up the famous hill, and on to Titsey. After this you have to use your imagination a good deal and follow roads of more recent construction for quite a long time through Limpsfield, Godstone, and Bletchingly, where, by turning up towards Graveley Hill and taking the left-hand turn just before Arthur's Seat, you can join it again and follow it as far as Reigate Hill. Here you must again come down to new roads at Reigate and keep to them as far as Dorking, where, by turning up over Ranmore Common and White Downs, joining the road again at Abinger Hall, you can observe a little of the atmosphere which is so noticeably absent on the new concrete highways.

The Way is next heard of below Albury Downs, two or three miles from Guildford. In fact, you can look at its traces from the top of Newlands Corner. After this it hides itself, but it continues south of Guildford over the Hog's Back to Puttenham, and then fairly straightforwardly to Farnham. In any case you, as a modern pilgrim, will

have a pleasant drive that way, and, if you feel inclined, for the rest of the time as far as Winchester. I have no authority for saying so, being no antiquarian, but I imagine there is a certain amount of reason for supposing that many places throughout the course owe their ecclesiastical names to the pilgrims: Abbots Worthy, Martyr Worthy, Itchen Abbas, Bishop's Sutton, and farther east two or three hermitages. Pilgrim Houses, Monkery, Pope Street, and so on; though I do not offer Parsons Corner as a likely identification.

As I say, there are wise people who can show you almost exactly where the pilgrims marched, and those who are lucky enough to know them can have their footprints marked out on their map. But those of us who must be content with the ordinary map we buy in a shop can still through nearly the whole of a beautiful drive follow in imagination the road which bore such picturesque bands of travellers.

The distance from Canterbury to Farnham is approximately ninety miles, and twenty-seven on to Winchester.

CHAPTER V

HAMPSHIRE, WILTSHIRE, BERKSHIRE

Of the places for pleasant week-end motor wanderings on the edges of Wiltshire and Hampshire there is, happily, as yet, no end. A man of a peaceful, gently curious turn of mind, loving streams and hills and woods, but above all streams, may take his car on a Saturday and Sunday into hiding-places of unguessed-at beauty between Alresford and Wherwell, the three Wallops, and Romsey, on the edge of the New Forest. Above all, streams he must love. For in that triangle run two of the greatest trout streams of the kingdom, and one of the least-known and most beautiful brooks. The Test and Itchen and Wallop water those valleys, and not in all the rest of wonderful England will you find anything quite so perfectly English. Is it because Izaak Walton is believed to have given us fly-fishing that the art seems so essentially English at home and so unmistakably foreign abroad?

They lie fat and heavy, the trout of Test and Itchen, nosing thoughtfully at pool's tail between Itchen Abbas and St. Denys, Wherwell and Romsey, sublimely contemptuous of the fool of a man goggling at their massive backs over the

bridge coping. It would be well worth driving a couple of hundred miles to see them alone. They are personages, as much a part of that England as the streams that fatten them and the hills and meadows which surround them. It is only English trout that can rise to that rank.

It is best to begin your river journey at New Alresford, where you take the road west to Itchen Stoke, Itchen

Abbas, and Martyr Worthy, meeting the Itchen itself about a mile out of the village where it comes down from the lake in Grange Park. You keep it on your left to the point at King's Worthy where you turn to the right up along what used to be a Roman road to Wherwell. I have no intention of entering Wherwell in the immense and unceasing beauty competition of English villages. We all know at least a dozen of the most beautiful villages in England, and it is quite enough to say that Wherwell qualifies to enter. It is an exquisite place standing on the bank of an exquisite stream.

You turn to the right and join the silver Test, a careless, sprawling stream, widening out here and there into something almost important, and narrowing down again or splitting itself nonchalantly into two or three copies of itself. Just after Wherwell you get an enchanting view of a great stretch of the Test Valley, a green place enclosed in hills, which, again, is even more English than the Constable country and, while very like it, infinitely more beautiful. Following the Test down towards Romsey, you should turn off just opposite Stockbridge and make for Nether Wallop, another example of England's most beautiful village. Here you meet the Wallop brook, and, turning to the left, follow it to Bossington, by John of Gaunt's Deer Park, where you again join the Romsey road. All along here your eye is constantly caught by thatched garden walls and by pieces of house-thatching which must be unequalled anywhere. One or two of the houses resemble nothing so much as grey beehives.

On the road between Nether Wallop and Broughton there is a wonderful beech-tree tunnel, and through the trunks on your right you look out over another miniature valley at the very happiest kind of white, green-shuttered house standing above the Wallop. You meet the Test again at Bossington, and follow it down to Mottisfont, where you cross it just before the railway. You should stop on the bridge, which is a wide one, and look upstream to the farther bend. No river in the world can look just like that but the Test on a day of white clouds and patchy sunshine. The Test follows you on your way to Romsey, where you leave it starting on the last stages of its journey to Southampton Water.

Homeward, your way lies best, I think, through Ampfield, Otterbourne Hill, and Nob's Crook, close to where you again meet the Itchen. By Eastleigh, however, it goes off by itself in an exclusive manner through meadows

where you cannot follow it, and you are compelled to take the road to Bishops Waltham, and then drop south down to Wickham, where you come across yet another Hampshire stream, the Meon. Turn to the left in Wickham and follow this very junior river past Soberton, Droxford, and beautiful Meonstoke to West Meon. The Meon Valley is quite unlike the Test and Itchen Valleys, but it has its own quiet beauty, and makes a very fitting conclusion to your cruise among the Hampshire streams.

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Looking at it on the map, you would not think that, considering that Portsmouth and Southampton lie to the south and Basingstoke and Alton to the north, it could possibly be as private as it is. There is not very much of it—at least of the part in which you will see Spring at her best—but what there is is certainly one of the most beautiful places in England. It lies between Petersfield on the east, Winchester on the west, and Wickham on the south. The Portsmouth road from Hindhead, through Petersfield, bounds it on the east, and the Winchester–Basingstoke road on the north-west, but the roads in between, although they may be officially known as main, are generally empty. The best way to see this corner of England is to make a double journey of it. Supposing you to be coming from town, you take the Portsmouth road as far as Petersfield and there turn off to the right, through Langrish and Bramdean, to the outskirts of Winchester at Magdalen Hill.

As soon as you leave Langrish you climb up among downs of extraordinary beauty, and the road runs switch-backing through beech-grown cuttings, and wherever you top a rise you have those spacious outlooks which, with just a hint of mist, give you that wholly English impression of distance. Like everything else in England, this run of some eighteen miles is quite unlike any other part of England. It

is a country of spinneys and hill-tops and wide acres. Here the fields and meadows are laid down on a generous scale, and as you make your way over the rolling hills you realise once more how marvellous it is that within such tiny limits you can have really open country.

Your way back from Winchester will take you through the valley of the Meon, where you come across something entirely different. Here it is all woods and great parks, fine houses and splendid trees. If it were not England, it would be extraordinary that two such completely different kinds of scenery could lie side by side as these do. From Winchester you follow the road over Deacon Hill through Morestead to Corhampton and Meonstoke, where you turn to the left and, following the river, go past Warnford Park to West Meon, and, with the river still beside you, follow the curling road to East Meon. Here it is well worth your while turning south past Wetherdown to Hyden Hill and Hyden Wood, and straight on past Catherington, where you enter the Forest of Bere. For three miles or so you will have to follow the Portsmouth road as far as Waterlooville, but at the latter uninviting spot you can turn off to the right and take the road to Hambledon, and, still bearing to the right, reach Clanfield and the Portsmouth road five miles short of Petersfield.

Although the distance of this run is about one hundred and sixty miles from London, or if you make many detours, rather more, you can scarcely better it for a spring day's drive, when lighting-up time comes at a reasonable hour. In the ordinary way about one hundred and twenty miles is quite enough for a day's drive when you are out to enjoy scenery, but as about a hundred of the miles of this drive are on the Portsmouth road, which is, I suppose, the best road we have and certainly the most beautiful (don't forget that you go over Hindhead, at this time of year innocent of hordes of trippers), I have no hesitation in placing it very

high up in the list of runs you should make to meet Spring. There is, quite literally, not a dull or ugly mile in it, and except for that short stretch above Portsmouth you are, as I said, in open country. A further variation and extension which it is well worth your while to make is, when you have come down from East Meon to Waterlooville, to keep on till just short of Cosham, where you turn to the right and swing up on to the top of Ports Down, where you have one of the greatest views in the British Isles. You can reach Hambledon and finish the original programme by turning up north to the right before you get to Nelson's Monument where you take the road for Southwick about five miles from Hambledon.

Chief among Hampshire's own special charms, I always think, is its unspoilt look of real country. Its side roads may be abominable, and frequently are, but they have this virtue, that they remain uncrowded, and you may drive a whole day through rural Hampshire without meeting more cars than you would have done fifteen years ago—except, of course, in towns. You may be within twenty miles of places like Basingstoke, Andover, and Salisbury and Southampton, and yet the narrow lanes and the roads that sweep up over the Downs remain undated. You might put your time-clock back thirty years.

A lonely part of Hampshire is the country round Ink Pen Beacon. This is a mighty fine hill, overlooking some of the best Hampshire country, and it and its smaller brethren, to the east near Kingsclere, give you a most delightful destination. The Londoner, as a matter of fact, has slightly the better of the various approaches, although the road from Bath through Devizes and Pewsey ranks high as a fine drive. The best way for the Londoner, or people living round Reading, to reach this very pleasant land, is to take Stratfield Mortimer as a point of departure, setting out past Silchester, where there are some visible remains of a

Roman forum and camp. The road is a winding one, and a large-scale map of the first order should be carried, and time forgotten for the moment. After Silchester Common, you go through Tadley and Baughurst and Wolverton to Kingsclere, where you turn sharp to the left, and heading south, climb up White Hill, which adjoins King John's Hill. A mile beyond the summit you take a right-hand turn, and follow for a mile the track of the Roman road, which used to run from Salisbury to Silchester, known as the Port Way, and keep on down to Cold Henley, soon after which you join the Whitchurch–Newbury road. Quite close here is the pleasantly-named place of Freefolk and Freefolk Wood.

The stretch of road between Cold Henley and Burghclere is one of the most picturesque in the south of England. There is not very much of it, but over the stretch of four or five miles which separates the line of the Port Way from Burghclere, you see on either hand the full beauty of the Hampshire Downs, Ladle Hill, with its camp on the right, with Beacon and Sidown and Pilot Hills on the left. For English downs their altitude is quite respectable, most of them being over eight hundred feet, but on a fine spring afternoon, with the sunshine a little misty, you would be inclined to treble those figures. All the hillsides round here have a particular joy for the bird-lover, as the inhabitants seem to have less distrust of human beings than anywhere else. It was just off this road, in a little lane leading towards Ladle Hill, that I got, at four o'clock on a fine afternoon, the closest view I have ever had of a barn owl. He was in the middle of the road as my car turned the corner, and at the sound of it he spread his immense wings, which looked dead white in the sunshine, and lit in a small thorn by the side of the road. I stopped the car immediately underneath him without upsetting his composure in the least. He stared at us (and therefore at the declining sun), and evidently

decided that invisible people, even though they may make strange noises, are innocuous.

At Burghclere you can make your North Hampshire cruise complete by keeping on to the turning opposite Highclere Station, where you take the left hand, and again two miles farther on, the next left-hand road down past the Three Legged Cross Inn, to Hurstbourne Tarrant, and westward to Vernham's Dean and Oxenwood. Here you begin to climb again, taking the right-hand road to Ham, which lies immediately under the shadow of Ink Pen Beacon. From here westerners and northerners make their way home via Newbury, and Londoners through winding lanes past Westwood Hay and Wood Hay Station and, missing Newbury, across Greenham Common, and so back to Stratfield Mortimer, by Brimpton and Aldermaston. The last few miles, from Brimpton to Aldermaston, run through delightfully wooded country.

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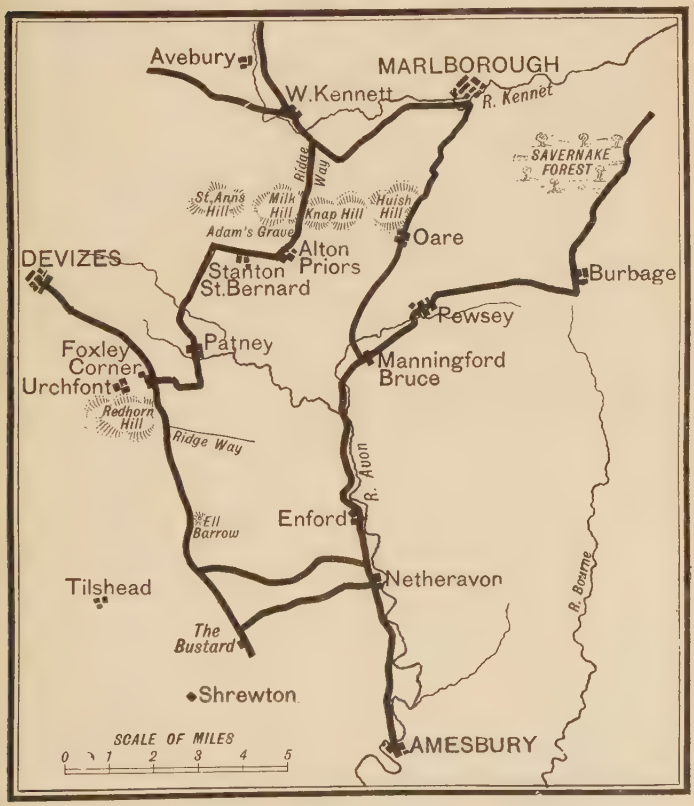
Although there are many hundreds of miles of pleasing by-roads in most counties, even in those nearest London, in which the motor wanderer can gratefully take refuge from the crowds which throng the main roads, it is in Wiltshire that he can find, after a little patient search, a stretch of road which is, I suppose, the loneliest south of the Derwent river. This is a by-way, marked on the map as of the secondary class, which crosses the north-eastern end of Salisbury Plain, and for those who wish to get completely away from man and most of his works, it makes a very good objective for a drive especially for those who live round Bath and Bournemouth and Oxford.

The pleasantest way of reaching this unique spot is to start from Marlborough or, in the case of those coming from the west, West Kennett, on the Bath Road, and turning south, climb up over the Ridge Way, at the top of which,

at eight hundred feet above the sea, you have a great prospect of huge, smooth downs, enormous fields, and the heavily-timbered vale of Pewsey just seen over the edge of



the hill beyond Alton Priors. From where you look out by Adam's Grave, you have on either hand St. Ann's Hill, Milk Hill, Huish Hill, and Knap Hill, all notable eminences characteristic of their county. It is another one of the countless places in England where your eyes are bewitched and where distance becomes a meaningless term. You may be

two, four, or even ten miles from this or that blue range of miniature mountains, but it feels as if you were three or ten times as far.

At Alton Priors turn to the right, and, skirting Stanton St. Bernard, take a sharp turn to the left, and, passing Patney, come down on to the Pewsey–Devizes road, just east of Urchfont. About a mile towards the latter, at a place called Foxley Corner, you come to the lonely road on your left. It is called Redhorn Hill, and there is a large notice-board which informs you that owing to the frequency with which the King's gunners practise across those empty spaces above, the road is closed to the general public too often to make it worth while to keep it in repair. Do not be put off by this (unless, of course, practice is actually going on), but climb up the hill. It is a very picturesque road, and, for the first mile or so, is in good condition. When you have reached the top, not far from Ridge Way, at seven hundred feet altitude, the warning notice-board begins to have a reason for its existence. It must be many years since that road has been repaired. It is of no importance, however, as the worst that can be said of it is that it is grass-grown and stony and that on very wet days the ruts might prove a temporary nuisance.

For some seven miles the path runs through an immense solitude, a place of nothing but limitless heather and sky. In the distance you can see butts and occasional telegraph poles, but nothing else made of man spoils the view enjoyed by the countless rabbits which live up here. I should think that not more than one car in a generation of rabbits is ever seen up here, judging by the surprise with which my own car was greeted. I dropped down over a little rise into what seemed to me to be all the rabbits in the world, and the apparition was so unexpected that even at a foot's pace, scores of the landowners narrowly missed getting themselves run over. On either side of the road green plover

regard you in much the same frame of mind. They raise their crests and examine you with amazement, but apparently without the slightest apprehension. Only on some of the most out-of-the-way northern moors have I come across wild things so extraordinarily self-possessed in the face of strange matters. This place is undoubtedly the kingdom of the rabbits of England. It is also probably their Valhalla.

The lonely road comes to an end with theatrical suddenness in the middle of Bustard Camp, where you turn to the left along the Pack Way. This leads you down to the Valley of the Avon, just north of Amesbury. There are two ways along here, but by far the best is the least obvious, that is to say, the main road past Enford. The other road, which is a true by-way, is on the farther side of the river, half a mile away, running parallel with you, but the main road is extraordinarily happily situated well above the valley, and from it you get, for some six or eight miles, most attractive views of one of the prettiest valleys in England. There is everything that is most English about the Valley of the Avon just hereabouts—grey church towers, old houses and pollard willows all reflected in the stream, little villages half seen between the woods which stretch up towards the hill-tops beyond. After the lonely road, those few miles of England, and most civilised England, give you a wonderful contrast.

For those who live in the west the way home lies through Manningford Bruce, Oare, and Marlborough, and for those who live in the east, through Pewsey, Easton Royal, and Burbage, where lies some of the pleasantest country in Wiltshire.

Close by, for example, lies Savernake Forest, and when you see it properly for the first time you will realise that the more you explore the country for a hundred miles round London in your car, the faster do your discoveries multiply. You may think that you know everything there is to be

known, and have seen everything there is to be seen along any given main road, even if you have known it all your life, and yet every time you pass that way it is a certainty that you will find something at whose existence you had not guessed.

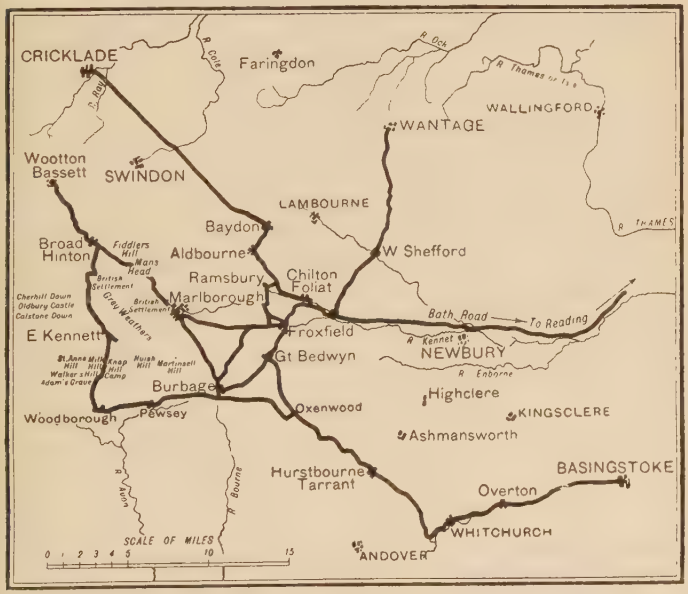
Most of England is largely made up of scraps—scraps of hill ranges, scraps of forests, little sudden valleys which seem to have been dropped down anywhere and forgotten, little moors. And the best of it is that you will, as often as not, find these things in the most unexpected places—a scrap of forest just where you would expect bare hillsides, and a little moor where you have every reason to suppose there will be cultivated fields.

This is only, after all, one of England's million charms—one of the things which give the explorer by motor-car an endless field for his search.

A particularly attractive scrap of old England is Savernake Forest. The Bath Road runs through this exquisite wood, and I suppose, perhaps, one out of every ten thousand of those who cross it on their way to the West Country or London gives it more than a passing glance of admiration. Savernake Forest, tiny as it is, is one of those pieces of England which could not, by any flight of imagination, be conceived anywhere else. There is no magic in it as there is in the New Forest, none of the wildness of Dartmoor, Exmoor, and the Cumberland Fells, but its very trimness of beauty, a beauty almost theatrical, puts it very high in the rank of the essential bits of England. It is a park and a forest in one, and you will have to go to Windsor Forest to find worthy companions to its ancient oaks. Savernake may be a scrap, but it has a quality denied to every other forest in England. It is simply impossible to be anything but cheered up in it. It is the gayest wood imaginable. When life seems to have reached the lowest point in dreariness, get into your car and go to Savernake Forest.

It is, as I said, nothing but a fragment of forest, and,

moreover, a good deal of it is private, yet so potent is the spell it can exercise over you that it is more than worth while making a whole day's drive for the sake of spending an hour among its gossiping trees.



It is most happily situated, almost surrounded by hills, nearly every one of which you are able to explore by car. To the north-west of Marlborough there is Hackpen Hill, eight hundred and eighty-one feet high, the road to the summit of which passes a British settlement, and the place called Man's Head. From the top you drop down Fiddler's Hill to Broadhinton and turn south to Beckhampton, where you look down upon a semicircle of wooded hills. There is Calstone Down, on which stands Oldbury Castle, St. Anne's Hill, Milk Hill, where there is Adam's Grave, Knap Hill, Huish Hill, and Martinsell. Most of these are over eight hundred feet high, St. Ann's and Milk Hill being

near upon a thousand. In this merry part of the country these little things take on the aspect of great mountains.

Very few places in England are so remarkably well arranged for exploring as this bit which contains the Marlborough Downs and Savernake Forest. You can drive, as I have shown on the map, completely round it and across it, almost in every direction you wish, and although you are only exploring a patch about fifteen miles square, the scenery and the little roads vary so delightfully that you feel, at the end of the day, as if you have explored the whole county. For the antiquarian there are any amount of things of interest, but you will not go a second time into the Savernake country to look at piles of stones, however ancient, or to admire those tediously ingenious people, the Romans who occupied Britain. You will go because of the comfortable woods, the smiling hills, and the ancient peace of the place.

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West and south of the forest lie some of the best downs in all England, among which the pursuit of spring may be carried on with the happiest results.

At all times of the year the Berkshire Downs are beautiful. When you see them in spring, you know that they are unsurpassed and that they will never be quite so exquisite again; in their summer glory you forget all about spring; and in autumn you swear that in their folds and hollows the gold-and-red beeches are finer than anywhere else in England. Quite truly you will say that the Berkshire Downs are beyond compare.

Oxford folk are lucky in having one particularly fine spring day's drive which will take them through the best of the Downs in a way which enables them to see both sides of a thousand pictures. The run includes Newbury and Whitchurch on the outward journey, and Andover, Hungerford, and Faringdon on the homeward run. This is the best way to plan it.

Leave Oxford by the road to Abingdon, and from here take the road to Newbury. You are in the valley until

you reach Steventon and have crossed the Wantage–Streatley road just west of Harwell, but after that you climb steadily up into those glorious open places where the winds are the breath of health itself. Past the Chilton Downs through

East Ilsley and until within a few miles of Newbury you can feel all round you that peculiar freedom of the down country, and, even if it be raining and blowing, it will make very little difference to your peace of mind.

From Newbury you make south-east for Kingsclere, and a mile or so out of the village climb up White Hill, a magnificent specimen of a down-side. The road sweeps generously round a big curve and, as if through a suddenly-opened window, shows you what looks like half England. At the top, or, rather, just beyond it, you cross the tracks of the Port Way, and here you turn south-west by Cold Henley down to Whitchurch.

From Andover, where you turn homewards, you will need to study a large scale map with care if you do not wish to get lost. Getting lost on the Berkshire Downs, however, is invariably a joyous adventure, and you might do worse than leave the map at home and trust to luck. Whether luck means being punctual or not, it will certainly include beautiful things to look at. You take the road to Weyhill, forking to the right, first just outside Andover, and the second time a mile farther on. Beyond Weyhill comes Ludgershall, and thenceforward you are once more in the down country. Near Collingbourne Ducis you take an unlikely-looking road to the right, where stands a sign-post, faintly suggesting that you should go to the camp by the Downs. It is an excellent suggestion, and the roughness of the road should not deter you from following it. You immediately begin to climb again, until on the Fairmile Down you are up seven hundred and fifty feet, and have once more a wonderful spread of country below you. On your right Wexcombe Down forms a very fine vantage-point for still more wonderful views, and if you do not care to take your car along the admittedly very rustic lane which leads to the top of it, you can make the expedition on foot with ease, as it is only about a mile.

From Fairmile Down you drop down into lower levels at Wexcombe, and, amid a multitude of enticing side-roads, make your way to Shalbourne and through smiling country down the hill into Hungerford town. Here you turn to the left and follow the Bath Road for a short distance, taking the first turn to the right, which will lead you to Chilton Foliat and one of the most bewitching stretches of the River Kennet. Take the next turn to the right after you pass the inn and, within a mile or two, you will find yourself again in a solitude so great that you will find it difficult to believe there is a town within fifty miles. About seven hundred feet up you will find yourself at Lambourn Woodlands, and, beyond Lambourn itself (drive with particular caution here, as the Lambourn children seem to be countless), on the Downs by Seven Barrows. At a place called Mile End the road forks, and your way lies to the left. About three miles farther on you come to the top of Blowing Stone Hill, a long and steep descent, skirting Kingston Warren. At the foot of the hill stands the famous Blowing Stone, about which there are several legends to choose from, some of which may be respectable history.

Although your direct way home lies straight on through Kingston Lisle (Fawler Hill, just beyond it, is steep and dangerous) and Uffington, it is more than worth while to turn to the left at the foot of Blowing Stone Hill and take the road to Woolston. Those two or three miles of road, winding along underneath the White Horse Hill, have an extraordinary charm of their own. You are not in the valley and not on the hills, and you see the beauty of both on either hand, for the Vale of the White Horse lying to the north of you is a notable vale. You should drive with considerable caution along here, as the road is narrow and has very abrupt turnings.

At Woolston you turn to the right and make for Faringdon and Oxford by way of Longcot.

CHAPTER VI

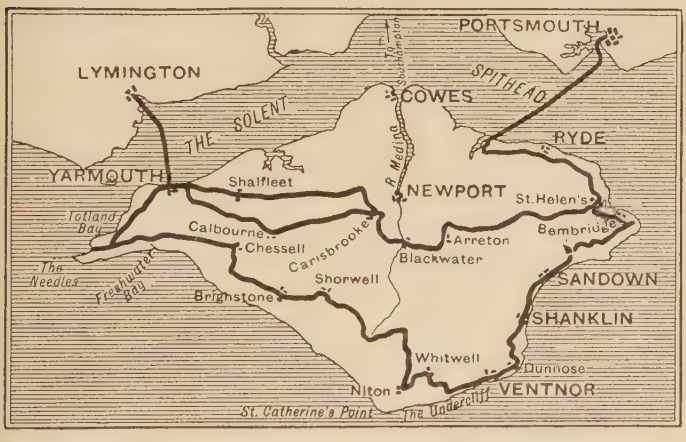
HAMPSHIRE

If you considered the Isle of Wight by the cold light of scale and mileage you might reasonably conclude that it offered little to the motorist, save a pleasant detour on his way from Bournemouth to Brighton. It is very small, and unless you retrace your tracks there is not much more than a hundred miles of roads for your exploration. The River Medina besides is, in so far as a stream of these dimensions can be, an inconvenience. If you are travelling east or west in the northern half of the island, you are compelled to go round by Newport, where it ceases to be wide enough to impede you.

Do not, however, be persuaded to consider this pleasant adjunct of that pleasant county of Hampshire in this narrow way. Its hundred miles can give you a deal of comfort when most roads elsewhere are too riotous for happiness. Coming from the sister and larger isle, you will at first be slightly bewildered by the distances between one place and another, and by the time you take to cover them. You do not make very distinguished average speeds in the Isle of Wight. Yet, after only a very few miles, you will find that everything is, after all, to scale. Those ten miles you have just covered between, let us say, Bonchurch and Ryde, have taken you, you are prepared to swear, quite as long as would twenty across the Solent. Very likely you are

under-estimating it. You have probably taken as long over them as over twenty-five or thirty on the mainland. But you have not wasted your time.

There are three ways of reaching the island; from Lymington to Yarmouth, from Portsmouth to Fishbourne, and from Southampton to Cowes. From the point of view of gaining the best first impressions, the ferry from Lymington is probably the best. In any case, either that or its partner from



Portsmouth is the most convenient and least troublesome. The charges are high, amounting to something like 4*s.* 6*d.* a mile, for a car under fourteen feet in length, return.

Deeply as it may go against the grain to pay so much to a railway company (it takes an hour to cross from Portsmouth to Fishbourne), it is really worth it. Yarmouth has few equals as a cheery port of arrival, with its tiny jetty, its toy harbour—the breakwater looks as if it were made of hurdles—its gracious anchorage of little yachts, and its almost ostentatious lack of band, loud speaker, charabancs park, or beach-artists. It is certainly one of the most smiling havens in the world.

From Yarmouth, take the road south to Alum Bay and the Needles, a run, in English, of three or four miles, and do not be misled by the excellence of its tarred surface. It may look like a deserted bit of the Portsmouth road, but it is a real road of adventure, for all that. If you are lucky in your day, that short run to the island's end, by heather-grown hills, followed by the sight, from four hundred feet up, of Alum Bay and the oddly-named Needles, will be long remembered. It is like so many of England's famous things—Land's End, the Menai Straits, the Wash, and half a dozen others—a place we know of, never trouble to go and see until Fate takes us there, when we have no names hard enough for our own stupidity.

From the Needles take the southern road by Chessel, Brightstone, and Shorwell to Chale Green, if you propose to return by way of Yarmouth. If your idea is to cross to Portsmouth from Fishbourne, take the middle road to Newport by Calbourne to Carisbrooke and come down by Carisbrooke Castle, to Chale Green. This road is typical of the Isle of Wight, which is to say that its variety is infinite and bewildering. Indeed, anywhere in the western half you see and pass scenery of every kind, from deep woods to bare downs, from moors to marshes.

After Chale Green you make for the underside of St. Catherine's Hill, and, turning east, come to Ventnor and Bonchurch and their fine hills. Hereabouts you will do well to proceed with special caution. The road down to Ventnor from Whitwell is well named "Zig-zag" and "Alpine." The views as you climb up from Dunnose by Shanklin Down, above Luccomb Chine, are superb, but when you want to enjoy them you must draw up. The road's difficulties do not allow you to take liberties.

A satisfying cruise round the island can be pleasantly concluded by the run into Little Bembridge, and thence

either to Fishbourne, via St. John's Road Station, for Portsmouth, or, far better, back to Yarmouth by St. Helen's, Arreton Down, Arreton, Blackwater, Carisbrooke, and Shalfleet. It is sensible to avoid Ryde and Cowes, especially the latter, which must be one of the worst towns for motor-cars in the kingdom.

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At Yarmouth you take the steamer for Lymington, or rather you and your car sit in a barge and are towed there by that steamer, hindering her progress in no uncertain manner. A bargeful of cars is not a handy tow. The zigzagging is almost of war-time violence. And at Lymington you enter the New Forest.

It is all a magic wood, a wood in which things like distance and time and space have not the same meanings outside the boundary ringing the New Forest officially, where the only towns are Beaulieu, Brockenhurst, and Lyndhurst. It is a wood full of things you will not easily find in other places, such as purlieus and inclosures (as spelt) and walks. There may be different names for the same things elsewhere. but you cannot deny that Broomy Walk, Lady Cross Walk, Rhinefield Walk (and where, do you suppose, they got that name for it?); Dames' Slough, Set Thorn, and Holidays Hill Inclosures; Ogden's and Dibden Purlieus; Tiptoes; Marrowbones Hill, and Knight Wood Oak are far more exciting to pass on your wanderings than mere avenues, parks, and woods.

Argue as you may, you must prefer an age which regards an avenue as a path, and estates and woods as allotments. There is a spaciousness about these names which you will not find in many other places in England. They liked elbow-room, did Hampshire folk, after the New Forest ceased to be a king's pleasance. They had no notion of being cramped. It is likely that they could give that word its

full significance—even if they could not write it save in monks' Latin.

The New Forest is not the most wonderful or beautiful or romantic of all the beautiful, wonderful, and romantic

pieces of this blessed England of ours—but there is hardly an inch of it which is not all three. When I drive down there, in spring, summer, autumn, and winter—the beauty of a New Forest winter is a thing incredible—I am invariably convinced that there is nothing in the whole wide world to compare with that magic wood. Its spell is just as potent on a November afternoon as on a June morning; when

the trees are changing colour as when they are trying on their new leaves and matching them against the daffodils and bluebells at their feet.

If it is exquisite in spring with the new leaf, it is better in high June; when it changes through September and October to its last beauties in early November, and its winter austerity in the unfriendly months of January and February, you are ready to swear that it has no equal. Whether you spend your days in the wood proper along those enchanted roads cut through the centuries-old trees or out on the open moorland, so oddly christened "Walks," you do not care what month of the year it is. The beauty of the New Forest is a permanent thing, changing daily, but never diminished.

A motor cruise in the New Forest is necessarily a drive of a complicated kind. When the holiday crowds have left, it is no longer necessary to avoid the main roads, but although these take you through some of the best parts of the forest, it is in the little by-ways that you will find the greatest loveliness.

Here are ways which will give you some of the best of the wood, but as you must, to see it, not only retrace your wheel-tracks again and again, but often leave the car and go afoot to see the best things of all, you will find it difficult to do the thing properly. You cannot do anything "properly" in the New Forest. I daresay Merlin is at the bottom of it.

Supposing you are coming from the Salisbury direction, you can make a particularly beautiful drive of it in the following way. Come down alongside the River Avon from Salisbury, past Downton and Breamore to Fordingbridge, one of the countless beauty spots of the southern counties over which their admirers love to wrangle. Turn to the left and enter the forest proper, near Godshill, keeping on until you reach the Cadnam–Salisbury road at Bramshaw. Bear to the right along this road and keep to it for three miles

or so. Just before Cadnam a narrow lane on your right will take you to the Rufus Stone and Castle Malwood. In summer this is naturally congested with sightseers, but at most other times of the year you will probably have it to yourself. It is an extraordinarily beautiful spot.

Climbing up out of the glade, you cross the Cadnam-Ringwood road, and, coming down through Minstead to Lyndhurst, you take the road across Matley Heath to Beaulieu. This, I always think, is one of the most beguiling drives in the whole of the forest. The road runs across or near Ashurst Walk, Denny Lodge Walk, Lady Cross Walk, and you will not have left Lyndhurst a mile behind before you find yourself high up in an empty world of gorse and bracken and little shining pools. It is not high at all in point of fact, but it looks as if it were, which is nearly as good. It is essentially a place in which to spend as long a time as possible—an ideal place for a picnic, to be eaten by those to whom the silence of the real wild is one of the most important things in life.

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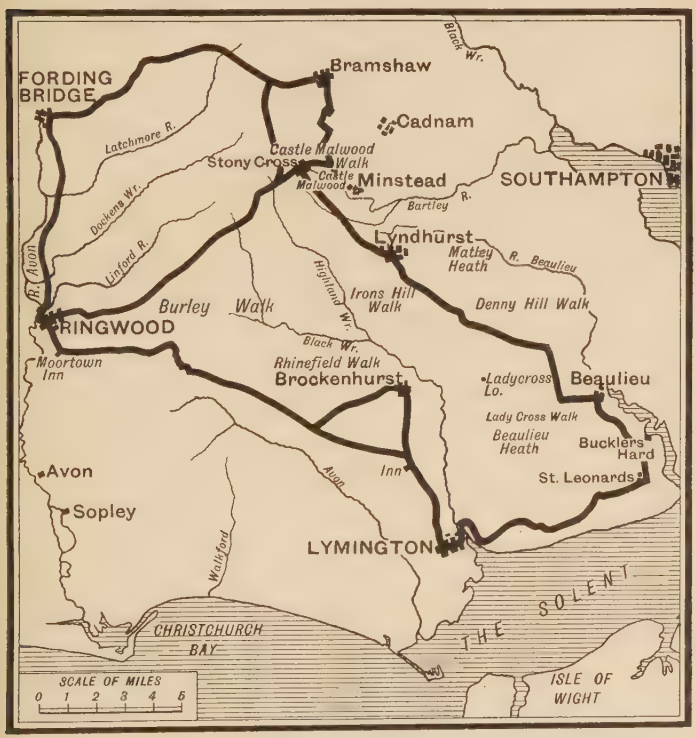
Here is another.

Go from Winchester to Romsey and take the Cadnam road as far as Ower, where you turn to the left to Totton, a suburb of Southampton. Here begin the possibilities of adventure, the probability of rough going, the certainty of swift acquaintanceship with the magic wood. Make for Beaulieu Abbey by way of Marchwood and Dibden Purlieu. The road, or what there is of it, is bad, but you should not forget that it must have been infinitely worse for the fourteenth-century ship-chandlers of Southampton when they took horse to Bailey's and Buckler's Hard, where great ships awaited their service. Buckler's Hard is one of the nicest places in all England—though you must like ships and England's history on the sea to agree with me.

Whether it is true that it is the site of the oldest ship-building yard in England is a matter for historians to decide. Its beauty alone makes up all the necessary attraction. From Buckler's Hard you turn west along a narrow and, it must be



admitted, pretty rough lane, past Sowley Pond—a little sheet of water in which, on a fair day, the pines which fringe it are very pleasantly reflected—and enter Lymington, whence your return journey lies west and north. Take the main Lyndhurst road, turning off it at Brockenhurst. This means a slight detour, but it is one well worth making for the sake of the drive over Rhinefield Walk. Those ten odd

miles between Brockenhurst and the Avon, just south of Ringwood, are in their way nearly as fine as the run to Beaulieu from Lyndhurst. Here, again, you are reminded of moors, whether in Devonshire or Yorkshire. There is no real resemblance, of course, except in the impression you get of great solitude and the air of the open spaces you gratefully breathe.

A third way, perhaps the best of all, is to Christchurch or Burley Street, whence you can go on by Stony Cross to Rufus' Stone, where the original owner of the wood is alleged to have been murdered (I daresay he was an irritating man, with his crude Norman manners, and that there was much to be said on both sides), or to serene Fordingbridge, by Ibsley, and on to Winchester by Whiteparish and John of Gaunt's Deer Park and Stockbridge; or from Lymington straight north to Lyndhurst, Cadnam, and Romsey. The wood is full of ways, and I make no attempt to do more than hint at their number and direction. Do not forget, wherever you go, that you are bound to pass within a mile or two, Sherfield English, Black Gutter Bottom, and Michelmersh. If the old names of this very old country appeal to you, these should have the courtesy of a passing attention.

There is nothing like the Magic Wood in the whole world. Nor is there any place so difficult to praise. Merlin's work again, no doubt.

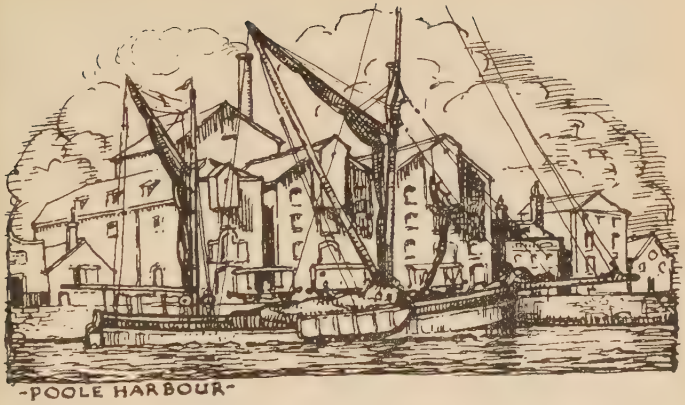
It is not the most wonderful place in oldest England, but it is not in the least like any other. We have other woods and forests, some of very high degree and ancient lineage, like Windsor; but not one of them has managed to "keep itself to itself" as has that probably very expensive deer-forest, which, it is said, William the Second gave himself as a present to himself from conquered tax-paying invaders. Windsor Forest is unlucky in its surroundings, while the New Forest has sea and river and estuary to help it, to say nothing of being some eighty miles from Charing Cross. The New

Forest is not the most wonderful, but it is the one which changes least.

As a matter of fact, it does not change at all—or, at least, perceptibly to each generation. Romsey may have more villas and hotels; and other places without the bounds, like Ringwood and Lymington, and even exquisite Christchurch, may gather yearly more fame in char-à-banc circles, but nothing much can happen to Beaulieu and Brockenhurst and Lyndhurst. They are on forest land, and although I daresay there is a legal meaning attaching to that beautiful word which denotes the exact opposite of what I write, the result is the same. The New Forest is not pock-marked with tin bungalows and it is a grave offence to attempt to camp in some of its glades. An offence, I should have added, for all except the forest ponies. They have licence to camp anywhere, and I feel it in my bones that the ponies are the one link which binds the New Forest to its ancient sovereignty. When the ponies go, the forest will go. You can see it for yourself, any day.

PART II

WEST OF THE SOLENT



-POOLE HARBOUR-

CHAPTER VII

DORSETSHIRE AND WILTSHIRE

If there is one feature about the country round the coast of Hampshire and Dorsetshire which endears it more than any other, perhaps, to the South of England motor-wanderer, it is that seasons and weathers do not avail to detract from its charm. You may drive anywhere between Devon and Portsmouth, in any circumstances, and enjoy it as much in the depths of winter as in high summer.

Myself, I think the Isle of Purbeck is perhaps the most alluring goal for a week-end run from either London or Cornwall. It is easy to reach, and all the roads leading to it are excellent, and when you get to it you find it something whch has no connection whatever with main roads. It is one of the many "islands" in England which is, at most, a modest promontory, but it looks exactly like an island when you approach it from Sandbanks, where the new floating bridge has been established.

Sandbanks itself is a kind of climax of the civilisation at Bournemouth, and really makes a very fitting contrast to what you are going to see. Even as you drive your car on

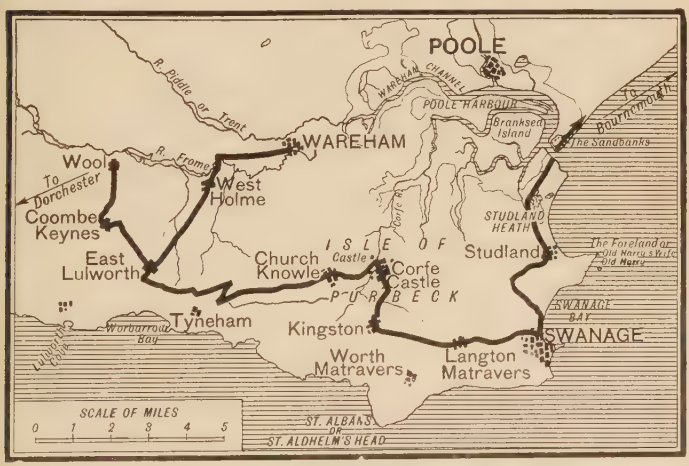
the floating bridge and turn your back on the resplendent hotel, you see in Poole Harbour, and Branksea Island, and its castle, on your right, and the open channel on your left, why, whatever its geological history may have been, Purbeck is called an island. It may be, indeed it probably is, because a river of some kind does actually separate it from the rest of England, but that has no connection with the impression you get from the bridge of its being a real island.

On landing on it at South Haven Point, you immediately find a small piece of motoring perfection in the shape of a faultless new road running through the wildest sort of country, heather-clad moors and hills, and past beeches and a string of ponds, called The Little Sea. The stretch between the point and Studland is one of the most pleasant surprises for the new-comer, and I am more sorry for the original inhabitants than I can say, on account of that road. Just that stretch of almost Scotch-like moor must have been one of the most gloriously private places in the entire kingdom. But you will be grateful for the new road which enables you to see it.

From Studland you begin to wander, aiming south first for Swanage and then up on to the top of the hills above St. Albans Head to Kingston, where you drop down into the valley again to Corfe, and once more stand amazed at the picturesqueness of that ancient castle and its position. From Corfe the road to Tyneham is one which, although it calls for a good deal of patience in the matter of getting out to open frequent gates, must on no account be missed. It takes you past Church Knowle and Steeple, and eventually ends up in Worbarrow Bay itself, a beauty spot almost without rival on this coast. The views you get here and there along these roads of the Dorsetshire headlands, bays, and coves, are worth any number of minor discomforts you may have suffered in order to enjoy them.

At Tyneham you face north again, and climb up over the

Purbeck hills themselves—a very steep and rather rough climb over a narrow road, which is also superfluously furnished with sheep gates. Your brakes must be in first-class condition, and it is as well to have a travelling companion who can share in the duties of opening the gates and preventing the car slipping down backwards over the precipitous down-sides. The top of Purbeck hills is, I



should say, unique of its kind. The summit is situated exactly under yet another gate, and the ridge is so sharp that with your car standing in the gateway there is no more than a few inches of real level ground to be seen; her front wheels will be below the top, and so will her back wheels. From this knife-like edge you look back over Worbarrow Bay and the sea, and in front of you over miles of weald, amazingly carpeted at the right time of year with purple heather.

There are one or two minor roads hereabouts—in fact, the whole drive is on roads of third degree—and it is quite easy to take a wrong turning, signposts being few and far

between. As good a way as any other is down by Creech Grange, Povington, and Lulworth. The road from here through Coombe Keynes to Wool is narrow and winding, and extremely picturesque. From these comparative flats you look back again to those wonderful Purbeck hills standing up in all the majesty of a real mountain range, and you will be hard to please if you don't elect this exquisite island to the most exclusive company of England's beautiful places.

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There are few counties so fortunate as Dorset in the eyes of the wanderer by car. It is not only because it is, past question, one of the most beautiful in the south, or, indeed, in the whole of England, but because it possesses the most fortunately-arranged by-ways from which nearly all the best of it can be seen without one's having to depend on the main roads. Moreover, except in the very height of the crowded season, when people are constantly journeying to and from its seaside towns or passing through it on their way to the western counties, its highways always seem less burdened with traffic than those of any county within a hundred and fifty miles of London.

Another reason why experienced motor-travellers return again and again to it is the great variety of its scenery. It has woods and hills and downland, rivers and valleys, ancient villages, the most English of market towns—usually anything but sleepy—and it shows you successions of them every few miles. No matter how often you drive about Dorset, you never leave it without the conviction that you have again seen new things. I suppose this could be said of nearly every part of wonderful England, but it is more evident in Wessex than anywhere I know.

It is a particularly happy hunting ground for the winter motor-explorer, partly because you can see so much of its special beauties within the limits of a short day's run, but

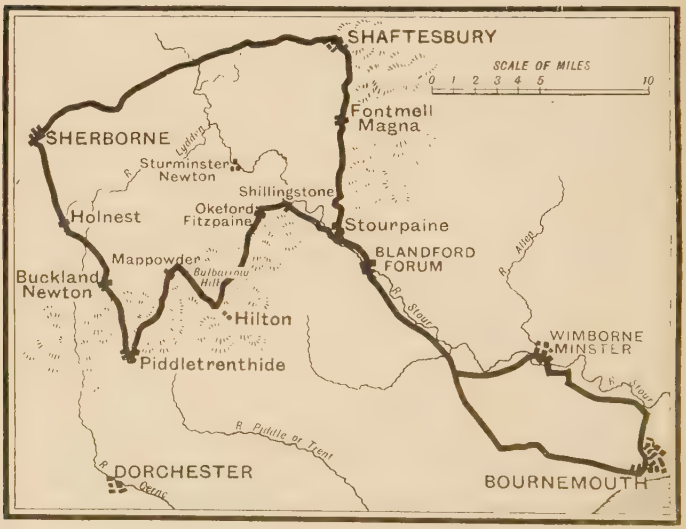
principally because of its uplands. From the roads which climb about and along the crests of that exquisite range of hills which runs from Blandford to Beaminster you will see, in a morning's drive, such loveliness of hill and valley as England and England alone can show. You spend most of the day seven or eight hundred feet up, and only fog can avail to spoil your delight. Those Dorset uplands can be as beautiful in wind and driving rain as in May sunshine.

Bournemouth motorists are, perhaps, the most luckily situated for a winter wander in the hills, as they can make a cruise among a good half of them in a single day without too early a start or too late a return, and with not much more difficulty finish them on another day. For the first day's adventure, Blandford is the initial point to make for, for preference by way of Wimborne Minster. After leaving the town by the Shaftesbury road, you follow the valley of the Stour as far as Thurweston bridge, which you cross and, turning sharp right, take the road to Sturminster Newton by Shillingstone. Near Shillingstone Station you turn to the left again and begin your hill drive.

The next twenty miles are anything but easy to follow, and you would be wise to carry that section of the Ordnance Survey map, on the mile-inch scale, which covers the country between Sturminster Newton and Maiden Newton. I know of no countryside in England in which it is easier to lose your way—nor any in which it matters less, if you do not happen to be tied by time. Okeford Fitzpaine is, properly speaking, the beginning of the upland drive, but although the road looks straightforward enough on the half-inch map, the lack of signposts, more pronounced hereabouts than in any other part of Wessex, complicates matters a good deal.

Your first objective is Higher Ansty and Ansty Cross, which you reach after climbing Wolland Hill. It is easy to bear to the right in Belchalwell Street, because the left-

hand road, the correct one, looks as if it led nowhere, and you should be on the look out for this. The climb up to Bulbarrow Hill is a real joy. The surface is certainly not good, but the gradient is not really steep, and any decent car will make light of it, in spite of the loose stones and mud. You will be compelled to stop at least twice before you reach



the summit, at nine hundred and fifty feet, to revel in the views from that shelf-like hill road. Blackmoor Vale lies out on your right, and it needs little imagination to believe you can make out Castle Cary over the hills to the west.

The road is very narrow just here, near the top, and a look out should be kept for carts and convenient places in which to back, in order to let them pass. It is all part of the fun, and at least an assurance that there will be few other cars up here on these empty hills. You drop down a little to Higher Ansty, and then turn sharp to the right at the church, for Mappowder in the green valley. Your map

must be at hand again for nothing is easier than to miss your way and find yourself on the road to Sturminster Newton or lost in the maze of little roads which pattern the valley.

At Mappowder, if you need more hills, you zigzag back up to Piddletrenthide and down again by Buckland Newton to Duntish, left again up Ridge Hill and once more down into the valley on the road to Sherborne. It is a crazy course you have to lay, but every mile of it is a joy. You must allow a full hour for every twenty miles you mean to cover, and even that may not be enough.

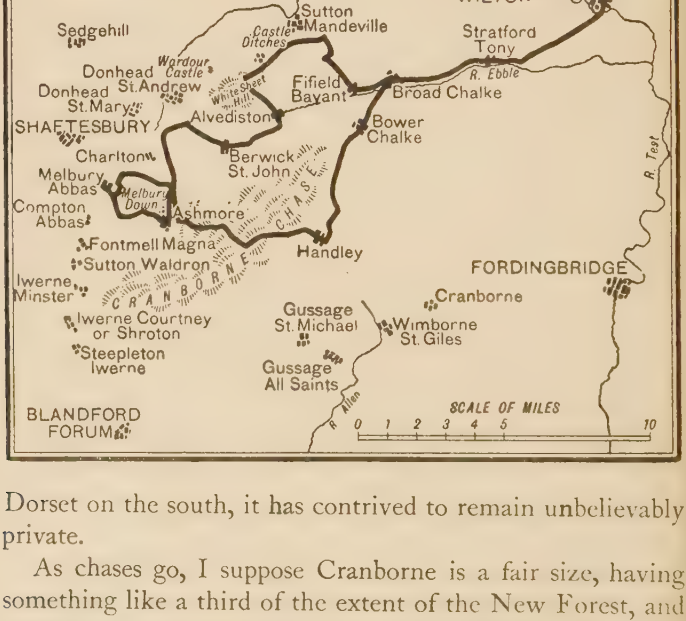
From Sherborne to Shaftesbury you have one of the fastest, really safe runs in the southern counties, as well as one of the most beautiful, ending superbly with the sharp climb up into the town. Turn south here and follow the winding road past Fontmell Magna to Stourpaine and Blandford. This, you will agree, is a particularly fitting close to your day among the lonely hill-tops. There are few valley roads to compare with it.

At Fontmell Magna a turn or two to the left will bring you to that exquisite place, Cranborne Chase, and it will be well for you if you take those left-hand turns.

England is full of amazing relics of bygone days, things, and places, names and customs, which have survived the passage of centuries in a way only possible here. No matter how quickly the towns may spread their brick and plaster over the face of the ancient land, there are things, English things, which seem to enjoy some magic protection. The bricks and plaster, with their attendant motor-bus services, petrol pumps, and wireless aerials, always seem to stop short of actual desecration.

Cranborne Chase is an old English thing which illustrates what I mean. It was once, I suppose, a game preserve, and I daresay that trespassers found it a good deal healthier, in company with any poachers that might cast an eye on its fatly-populated coverts and glades, to give its boundaries a

very wide berth. To-day you may drive your car through it practically where you please, and though I make no doubt that any poachers are dealt with in the same way as elsewhere, trespassers such as ourselves are welcome. Lying between two towns, Salisbury and Blandford, with another, Shaftesbury, actually in its northern fringe, with the high road to Devonshire on the north and the high road to



Dorset on the south, it has contrived to remain unbelievably private.

As chases go, I suppose Cranborne is a fair size, having something like a third of the extent of the New Forest, and although its length and breadth are only about twelve miles by six, it has enough pleasant by-ways to make it one of the most attractive objectives for a motor cruise, either east or west. It is, as I said, extraordinarily private, and even when you are using the well-rolled, well-tarred roads which skirt its outer edges, you do not feel so much that its privacy

has been disturbed by them, as that its lord knows how to keep his chase in very good order. Between Stratford Tony and Steepleton-Iwerne, Compton Abbas, and Broad Chalke, there are roads and hills in which you may lose yourself for as many happy hours as you please. There are some notable hills to climb, with very rewarding views to be seen from the tops of them, and all the hamlets and manors have the right and proper names of old England.

One of the great charms of Cranborne Chase is that, having so many roads running through it and across it, it is not a matter of any importance how you enter or leave it. One way is as good as another, but I warrant that when you have been an hour among its little hills and valleys you will not be satisfied until you have tried them all. A good way, taking Salisbury for your point of departure, is to follow the Blandford road as far as the River Ebble and turn off to the right here to Stratford Tony and Broad Chalke. Keep to the left, through Bower Chalke and Misselfore, over a notable hill, six hundred and eighty-one feet up, to Handley just short of the main road. Turn to the right, and face the heart of the Chase again at Tollard Royal and prepare yourself for considerable meanderings. You must follow the road over Woodley Down, as if you were going to Donhead St. Mary, but when near the summit of Melbury Down, turn abruptly to the left and make for Ashmore. Just before you reach the village, twist off again to the left to Melbury Abbas, which you leave in order to climb the appropriately named Zigzag Hill, which rises some three hundred and fifty feet in less than a mile.

Arrived at the top you have before you just one of those views which only England can give us. South lies the Chase itself, north the little valley of the Sem and the hills up to Warminster, east the hills run down from the ridges of the Chase to the Valley of the Avon. On a clear day it is a view which will keep you there for a long time, but

even on a day of driving rain, such as I had the last time I climbed up on to the top, you get a great impression of wide open spaces and free winds. It seems impossible that a place so untouched could be left just where it is.

Where the road comes up from Zigzag Hill you meet another running north and south, north to Donhead St. Mary, the south side of the Shaftesbury road, south to Ashmore. Follow the northern one to the main road, where you should turn eastward and leave it again about a mile farther on, where a side road leads you down to Berwick St. John. Just beyond here on your left is White Sheet Hill, a very formidable climb which, if you feel in an aggressive mood, you can attempt. This, or the easier one by Alvediston, will bring you again on to the Shaftesbury road, just short of Castle Ditches, and you turn back again into the Chase by Sutton Mandeville, aiming for Fifield Bavant, where you join the road to Salisbury at Broad Chalke. As I said, this is but one itinerary out of half a dozen, and if you provide yourself with an Ordnance map of a scale of a mile to an inch, you will make discoveries to delight you on many days. Wanderers from the south, by Dorchester, reach the Chase from Blandford, and from the west by Yeovil at Shaftesbury.

CHAPTER VIII

SOMERSETSHIRE AND DEVONSHIRE

The country between the Severn and the Channel has a number of very pronounced advantages over most parts of south-western England, but in spring there is one in particular which gives it a special attraction to the road-cruiser.

There is more light, and it always seems to me to last longer. The calendar may give me the lie on this point and prove that if there is any difference it must be so slight as to be unnoticeable. We who go West in the winter months know better. The West is, above all, the country of light. It is, therefore, in that blessed part of the world that one can begin earlier in the year to think of making real motor-tours, and, except in evil weather, be less haunted by the figures of lighting-up time. Your day in the West even in February is a longer day than in most places.

Those comfortable folk who live in Bath have some specially delightful week-end tours about them. Somerset has not the wild grandeur of Devon, but it is the county of green levels which has the greatest appeal of all its kind. In Somerset you can drive very happily at not much above sea-level for many miles without getting bored by the scenery, because there is always a pleasant range of hills somewhere about, either with fine woods on them or of the rolling downs order. And the hills themselves, when they lie in your path, are a delight to traverse. Here is one of several West Country tours which would convert the most ardent winter-hater to an appreciation of the possibilities of an English February.

You leave Bath by the road to Wells, not through Radstock, but by Chewton Mendip, where you climb up over the Mendips to a thousand feet and, a mile or so from Wookey Hole, drop down into Wells and fall in love anew with what must be the most picturesquely situated cathedral in England.

From Wells you run through the green levels past the Vale of Avalon to Glastonbury, and, bearing to the left, come down to Yeovil by way of Somerton, following from Ilchester a fine stretch of Roman road. At Yeovil take the road to Crewkerne, but turn off to the left at Haselbury Plucknett, and follow the road which takes you through North Perrott on to the Crewkerne-Dorchester road. This is a delightful stretch, where you begin a long climb up over the first of the wonderful Dorset Downs. That stretch from South Perrott to Maiden Newton holds in its twelve miles some of the most exquisite views in Dorset, the county of great outlooks. I am not sure that you do not get the best of it going the other way, but in any case he would be hard to please who would drive over this road without stopping half a dozen times in sheer gratitude for what is spread out on his left.

At Dorchester you come down again into the levels, and, passing through Puddleton and Milborne St. Andrew, come to Blandford, where, as the survey map tells you, there was once a fine forum. At Blandford you strike north to Shaftesbury, a town which holds a perpetual surprise for the traveller, no matter how often he may have driven through it. It stands magnificently on a high hill, and through the gaps between the houses in the main street you look out surprisingly over an immense spread of country. Its approach from the Sherborne direction, up the hill and round the sharp bend, is almost the approach to a strong place.

Keeping north from Shaftesbury, you stay up on the heights until you have left Sedgehill to the west, dip down

into a little valley and climb up again to East Knoyle and cross the main Salisbury-Wincanton road some eight miles from Shaftesbury. You are still here in high land, with fine views on either side, and so continue as far as Warminster. Your way back to Bath from here may be any one of three, each of which has its own peculiar charms. You may keep to the eastern road, through Westbury, Trowbridge, and Bradford-on-Avon, circling Bath on the north point of the River Avon; or you can follow the middle road through Beckington and come in to the city on the south side; or you can make it by Frome and Radstock.

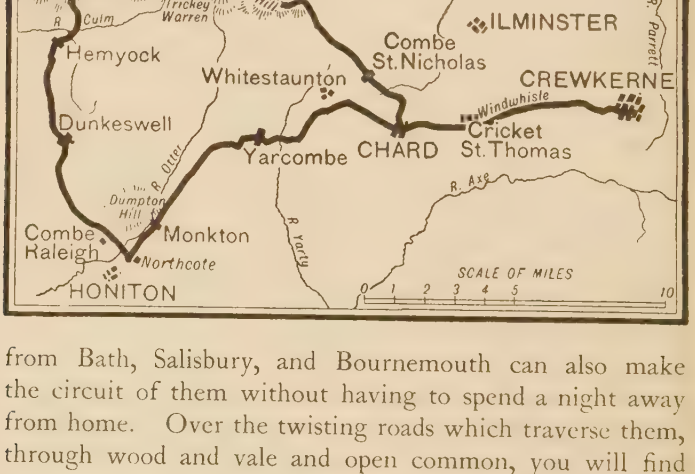
This tour is a particularly useful one to bear in mind as it can be greatly varied and pleasantly lengthened by going from Yeovil to Bridport, and so to Dorchester, and the roads within this course are so numerous and lead over such pleasant country that, by aiming for Shepton Mallet, Frome, Wincanton, Sherborne, and Cerne Abbas, you can plan figures of eight to your heart's content and in the certainty that whichever you follow you will see the real beauty of the Dorset and Somerset borderland.

It is the gate to the hills of the West, which begin within a few miles of Yeovil and carry you on almost to the Land's End, and as such it is a place of high distinction.

It is certain that the first to resent—and with every justification—any Pinchbeck nicknaming of their exquisite hill-country as an English Switzerland would be the lucky people who live among those lonely high places called the Blackdowns. Yet it is a description which I have heard applied to them by one who had every appearance of the native about him. It is probable that he has yet to see Lucerne and its fellows. The Blackdown Hills are small hills, and the Swiss Alps are large ones. There the resemblance ends. It is very curious, this passion for labelling any group of hills, with or without firs on them, as a local Switzerland. When you come to think of it, no other

place looks in the least like Switzerland. You would, in any case, have to go farther afield than an English western county to find the slightest hint at a likeness.

The Blackdowns are in a patch of country particularly easy to reach from almost any part of the West Country. They lie between Taunton on the north, Exeter on the west, Lyme Regis on the south, and Crewkerne on the east. For the lucky West Countryman they make a comfortable day's cruise, except perhaps from Cornwall, while motorists



from Bath, Salisbury, and Bournemouth can also make the circuit of them without having to spend a night away from home. Over the twisting roads which traverse them, through wood and vale and open common, you will find hill scenery and hill air of England's best kind.

For the wanderer from the east, say, from Crewkerne way (which means also the way from London, by Basingstoke and Salisbury), the proper course lies as follows. Take the Chard road from Crewkerne and immediately begin the series of climbs which will make the day's run memorable for you. The road swings up over splendidly-named Windwhistle, well over seven hundred feet up, to Cricket St.

Thomas, and drops down again to Chard in the valley. About half-way down the main street there is a turning to the right of Combe St. Nicholas, which is the real beginning of the Blackdown Hill road.

And it is certainly a real hill road, steep, winding, skirting sheer hill-sides, rich in sudden views of distant timbered vale and ridge after ridge of firred hill-tops. You climb steadily until on heathery Staple Hill you top the thousand feet mark and find yourself alone above a world of precipitous woods, beyond which you look out south down the valley of the Otter and the high ground above Sidmouth. Just before you reach the top of Staple Hill you see some thirty miles away the gold and purple glory of Dartmoor, its very self. This is a very good place for a halt, and a long one. There is probably no hill in all England from which such a variety of scenery can be enjoyed. From certain wind-swept summits in Yorkshire and the Cumberland Fells you may perhaps look out over a wider expanse, but the Blackdown Hill views are far richer. That far-away glimpse of Dartmoor—I suppose it must be Cut Hill and Yes Tor one sees—is alone worth a long day's drive. The trouble is that you are inevitably seized with an irresistible longing to go on and get closer to it.

The road begins to drop gently downwards after Staple Hill, and at Culm Head runs through a perfect gallery of beeches. On your right, the northern side, they stand four or five deep, like columns in a great church, but on your left, where you look out between their trunks over Trickey Warren and the Otter valley, they are but a single row. He was a great artist as well as a great woodsman who planted those trees just so. They make of that hill-side road a balcony, a veranda, any comfortable place where you take your ease and look at pleasant things from a distance. Their trunks, dazzling white in the setting sun, are rooted in banks of thick moss, and moss riots extravagantly along

the road edges. From these silvers and deep greens your delighted eye falls on the warm reds and browns of bracken below you and on the blue-black of a dozen little forests of fir and pine beyond.

At Wellington Hill you turn sharply to the left and make for Hemyock and Dunkeswell. It is a beautiful little road, rising and falling every half-mile, twisting round the plump Devon hillocks, giving your car constant surprises in the way of unexpected gradients. It suffers, as do so many of Devonshire's lanes, from a surfeit of high hedges, and you must often stop at a gap or field-gate if you want to see what lies on either side of you. And there is one particular thing which must not be missed. It is on your left, between Dunkeswell and Combe Raleigh, before you turn on to the road to Honiton. On a solitary hill, rising out of the only flats in sight, which I take to be either Dumpton Hill or Hartridge Hill, there is a clump which the winds have fashioned into the exact likeness of a prehistoric beast of the shape whose skeletons you gaze at in museums. From his "cruiser-stern" to the tip of his ant-eater's nose, sniffing furtively down at the green valley where lies the fat village of Monkton on the road to Ilminster, he is the monster of the pictures.

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All motorists who live in England are lucky folk, but none are more fortunate than those whose lives are passed near either of the great moors of Devonshire. Some of the most beautiful miles in the whole of Great Britain lie along those roads through and between Exmoor and Dartmoor, and it is no exaggeration to say that, given a properly adventurous turn of mind, you can find a new week-end run for every week of the year, and that none will be less exquisite than another.

Fitly enough, there lies between the two moors a main

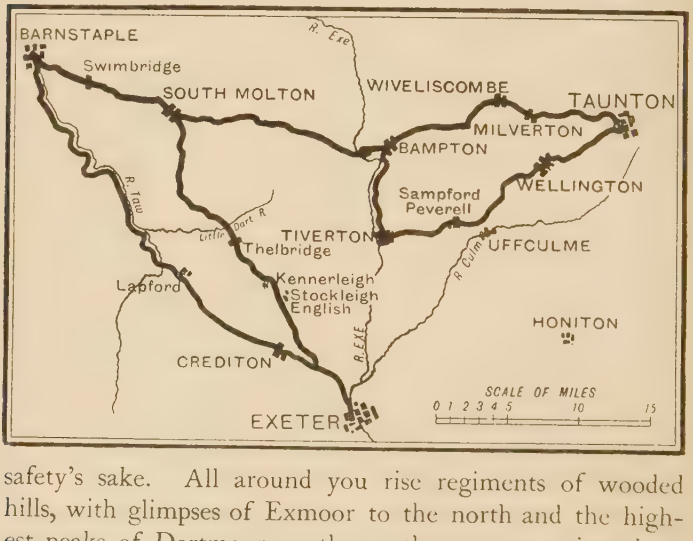
road drive which for its length must rank as one of the finest in the whole of the South or West Country. This is the run between Barnstaple, South Molton, Bampton, Wiveliscombe, and Taunton. It has a special appeal, to my mind, not only in its remarkable beauty, but in the fact that it is the least inhabited road of its type I know. It serves a number of small but, in their way, important towns; yet between each two you may run for miles through very real country.

Like all hill roads, it needs to be driven over in both directions, lest you miss half of its loveliness, and the best plan is, taking Taunton, Exeter, Tiverton, and Bampton as boundary marks, to describe a rough figure of eight. It does not really matter very much in what direction you drive in Devonshire, especially in this part of it, as every mile is full of beauty and no two miles resemble one another, and, in my case, such a week-end drive as this must not be a matter for hurry.

After leaving the Prehistoric Monster above Honiton, then, the road through Exeter and Crediton should be followed as far as Copplestone, where you bear to the right and come into the valley of the Taw, near Eggesford Station. From here onwards right into Barnstaple the road follows the river's twistings faithfully, and your eyes are delighted with one of the most beautiful valleys in the south. It is all peaceful country with that warm look which gladdens the heart of the Devonshire lover, and any temptation to drive fast must be most sternly repressed. It is not likely that the occasion will arise, but you should be on your guard against it, for you will miss countless treasures unless you keep to a positive crawl.

Before you reach Barnstaple, just after Bishop's Tawton, you join the main Barnstaple-South Molton road at Newport, turning sharp to the right, and begin the famous Barnstaple-Taunton run. Soon after Swimbridge you leave the Barnstaple levels and although you are not often really high,

from here to Wiveliscombe you seldom drop below six hundred feet except when you come down to the banks of the River Exe. After South Molton, a friendly little Devonshire town with those cheerful whitewashed houses, the road begins to twist in good earnest, and until you are on the outskirts of Bampton you must keep your car at a very moderate pace. Apart from the risk of missing the beauties of the road, a very slow rate of progress is necessary for



safety's sake. All around you rise regiments of wooded hills, with glimpses of Exmoor to the north and the highest peaks of Dartmoor on the south, great sweeping views of open country alternating with sudden and unexpected canyons. As you come down to the Exe a couple of miles from Bampton, you should look out for a tricky corner. On crossing the bridge, after a very sharp turn and drop, you may either follow the Exe round to the right, or turn to the left and then again sharp to the right, both ways bringing you into the town. As you will be coming back this way, I would advise the latter course.

From Bampton you still have wonderful scenery all the

way to Wiveliscombe and practically into Taunton itself. It is of the Somerset variety now, but none the less an abiding joy. At Taunton, or, if you have no wish to go into the town itself, at Milverton, turn to the right and come down through Wellington to Sampford Peverell and join the Exeter-Bampton road at Tiverton. Here you are on the Exe once more, and, turning to the right, you follow it to within a mile of Bampton, where, taking the left-hand road, you reach the point where you crossed the river before. Here you face again, between the river and South Molton, the twelve most beautiful miles of the run, and you will be amazed to find what seem to you entirely new and strange beauties, though it is, perhaps, no more than a couple of hours since you came that way.

It is, perhaps, best to turn Exeterwards again at South Molton, and take the cross-country road by Thelbridge. This cuts through the heart of the country which lay on your right on your outward journey, and gives you another exquisite hill-and-valley run. Soon after Thelbridge you climb up some seven hundred feet at the Black Dog Inn, and, once past Kennerleigh, drop down again into the valley of the River Creedy, and by Sandford come to Crediton and so through Newton St. Cyres to Exeter.

The distance of the full figure of eight is one hundred and sixty miles, making an ideal early summer day's run. For the most part the road surface is excellent, and, although you are among hills practically all day long, there are no dangerous gradients anywhere. The route as I have sketched it can, of course, be joined by those who live on the outskirts at any point. It can be varied almost infinitely, but the main point to remember is that the run between South Molton and Bampton, and, if possible, between Bampton and Wiveliscombe, must be taken both ways.

CHAPTER IX

DEVONSHIRE

You call Devonshire a fortunate county, but in doing so you should take precautions to ward off evil spirits such as the plans of jerry-builders. Least of all the counties in the South of England has South Devon been spoilt by outbreaks of bricks and mortar, or by any of the modern forces which destroy solitude. Motor coaches and bus services are certainly increasing, especially across Dartmoor, but they are a very long way as yet from being able to matter very much. That glorious wilderness need as yet take no notice of them. Thanks to the fact that only two roads cross it, by far the greater part of the moor is still a lonely place.

Those of us who pass the greater part of our lives on the real country roads of England must find their biggest appeal in their astonishing privacy. English roads offer to the traveller a wonderful combination of an open welcome and an intriguing aloofness. In some cases every road looks as if it were a private way through an estate, and you cannot drive long, anywhere well away from towns, without constantly having that feeling that you are both trespassing and at home.

Dartmoor, with its foothills and approaches, is one of the places where this delightful quality is most often found. There are lonely by-roads, especially on the east side, which seem so private as to make you feel guilty of impertinence in taking your car over them; which are often so deserted as to give you the delightful companion feeling of being a pioneer. It is true that they take some finding, these little roads, for anyone who is not a native of the moor, but I cannot think of any better way of spending a summer week-end than in a search for them in a well-found car capable of dealing with the precipitous hills one is likely to meet.

Here is a round trip which it took me several days properly to complete. It is a cruise for which the very best maps obtainable are a prime necessity; the scale should not be smaller than two miles to the inch, if you have any dislike of getting lost.

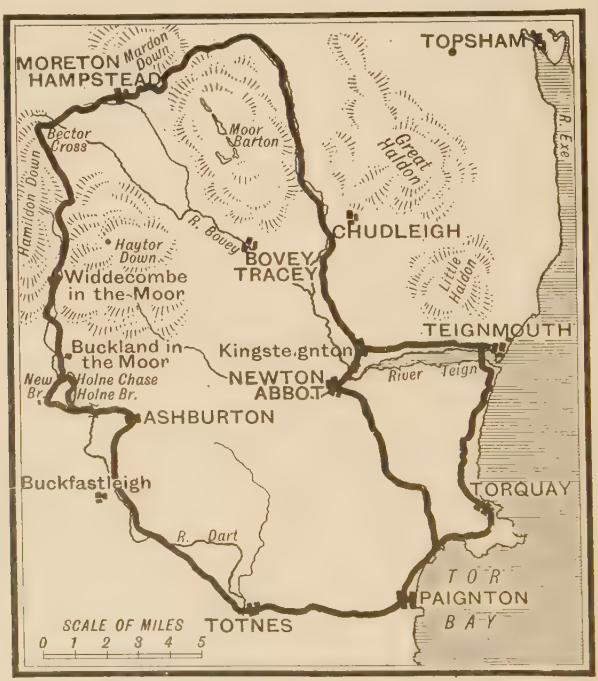
Starting from Torquay, you make first through Paignton for Totnes, where you turn north up to Buckfastleigh, running for part of the way along the lower reaches of that astonishingly beautiful stream, the Dart. Buckfastleigh is probably the only town in Devonshire which is not really attractive, but it is worth stopping there in order to see the abbey, which has been restored by the monks themselves.

Continuing north to Ashburton, you turn off, just before entering the town, to the left, and take the Tavistock road. At New Bridge, halfway up that terrific hill, take the unobtrusive turn to the right, where there is a signpost pointing to Widdecombe-in-the-Moor.

Immediately you begin the real adventures of the trip. Past Spitchwick and Buckland-in-the-Moor the road climbs extremely steeply, and unquestionably roughly, to a considerable height. It curls and twists through woods in which it is perfectly obvious no human being has ever set foot or wheel before, and your only sorrow, as a driver, is that the

navigation of the road takes up far too much of your attention to let you properly enjoy the fairy land through which you are passing.

At the commencement of this hill, on the right, there is a lodge and a gate to what really is a private road. By a piece of supreme good fortune, which may possibly be



shared by others, I was allowed to take this road. It is, I have the audacity to assert, the most beautiful river and woodland road in the whole of the British Isles. It follows the windings of the Dart along three sides of a very unrectangular square to Holne Bridge, now close to the river, now skirting the sheer cliffs above it. At one point there

is an example of the usual Lovers' Leap, an exciting place over which, the story runs, a hunted stag leapt a hundred feet into the Dart, followed by the hounds and the entire field.

If you are so lucky as to get permission to see this wonderful thing it would be better, perhaps, to take the magic road at Holne Bridge and come out at the lodge I have just mentioned at the foot of the hill, which turns up into the forest. From the top of this hill the road, now at the very respectable height of between eight hundred and nine hundred feet above the sea, twists and winds between the enormous bulk of Hamildon Down, Haytor Down, and Bonehill Down until it creeps out on to the main Moreton Hampstead-Tavistock road at Beeter Cross.

Widdecombe-in-the-Moor, although already an official beauty spot, is an irresistible village. It is absolutely typical of Dartmoor, and could not possibly exist anywhere else. All this stretch between Buckland-in-the-Moor and Beetor Cross is difficult driving, and the way is very easily lost. Signposts are found here and there, but they are not, to my mind, particularly informative. There are numbers of little roads which lead you astray into farms, and that first-class map will be found indispensable. All this is a great part of the fun.

Your way back lies through Moreton Hampstead, and by the high and winding road between Mardon Down and the big reservoirs by Moor Barton. You come down into the valley by Dimsford, and follow the River Teign to Chudleigh and Kingsteignton. Here the right-hand road will take you through Newton Abbot to Tor Bay and Paignton, and the left, which is by far the best, along the north of the Teign Estuary to Teignmouth, over the bridge, and along the switchback road into Torquay.

The distance of this run from Torquay back to Torquay is about seventy miles, but you should not set out upon this

wonderful cruise thinking of miles. Time is the only thing that counts, and that not very much. For between Ashburton and Moreton Hampstead you are going to see some of the best secrets of Dartmoor. And Dartmoor is full of them.

It does not matter in the least where you make your headquarters for a further search for them. They are to be found everywhere, most of them in the least expected places. Just off the main road from Tavistock to Ashburton, for example, you will find a reach of the West Dart that swirls very cheerily under a slope on which stands just the kind of house you have always wanted to live in.

It crowns the lower half of a big hill-side, standing at a proper distance from and below the road. It faces south with a little east in it—the only exposure, as the Americans say, for any house in this island. It has a broad terrace, from which you look down upon the river over the steeply sloping fields. The river is within earshot, but no more, and you can see a good mile up and down stream. There is a very beautiful old Dartmoor bridge—and there are no bridges in the world to compare with them—in the foreground, with a particularly lovely copse clothing the high ground beyond. I know no house in the world with a more beautiful situation.

It is a sunny house, a house made for sunny people with a love of the things that matter in life. It is high up and I have no doubt that in winter blizzards interfered seriously with the comfort of its owners—with their comfort, but not with their happiness. It is the sort of house in which the minor troubles of life are put in their proper place and the big ones faced with a smile.

I wonder when that last happened—for the house is a broken ruin. The walls are cracked, the windows stare sightlessly through broken panes, the avenue is overgrown

with weeds, the terrace is a wilderness, and the tremendous byres behind the back quarters, built to withstand centuries of Dartmoor gales and snow, stand gauntly empty. Nobody can have loved that house for a long time. It is dead. The Dart tramples past it under that ancient stone bridge, as it did when happy folk lived here, but that is the only trace left of the good times that were.

The Happy House is only one discovery you can make, and for anything I know, there are a dozen others like it —though I swear not one is as sunny. There are little valleys through which the moorland streams push their rocky way, odd little lanes leading nowhere in particular, terrific views from modest hill-tops, where you least expect them, the sea-clean air on the highest crests, the smell of earth and growing things everywhere.

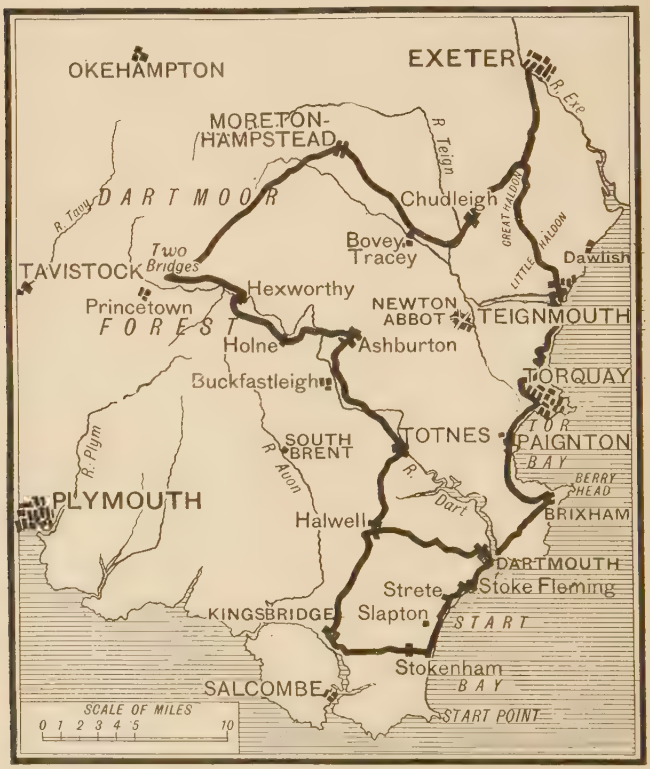
It is all empty of everything you hate; full of the things you love. There is nothing to compare with Dartmoor.

Indeed it does not matter whence you start to make friends with it—Tavistock, Okehampton, Exeter, Dartmouth, Totnes, or even Torquay and Paignton, most urban of sea-board towns. Any one of them will do as well as another.

From all of them delightful ways lead you to every corner of the moor. You may quite often have to get out and walk or scramble, sometimes climb pretty strenuously, but that is nothing to pay for the rewards you get.

A single week-end cruise, with Exeter as your base, which, for example, will fill you with deep gratitude for the gift of such a piece of countryside, is as follows: Follow the Bovey Tracey road over Great Haldon, and at the summit, some eight hundred feet up, enjoy the first taste of the sort of views amongst which you will spend the next two or three days. Looking back north over the valley of the Exe, past the city of Exeter, and at the hills beyond, Tiverton way, you will see one of the most superb spreads of country

imaginable. On a fine afternoon, under the light of a setting sun, that view from Great Haldon takes place as one of the greatest in the whole of England.



At Bovey Tracey take the road to Moreton Hampstead, which is the first town of Dartmoor, and then follow the Tavistock road. This will take you up to the very respectable height of over one thousand six hundred feet above sea-level, and you will be amazed at the sensation of vastness which the moor gives you. The road winds up to Postbridge round terrific heather-clad shoulders, skirting

the fringes of what look to be gigantic valleys, and when you come out on the summit you feel that you should be able to see most of England spread out below you.

Just after Postbridge you cross the River Dart for the first time, a very modest brook just here. At Two Bridges you turn sharp to the left on to the Ashburton Road. You are immediately faced with a long and steep hill, followed by a drop down to a little valley close to the turning off to Hexworthy, and a steeper one up the other side. Between here and Ashburton the road is a succession of exceedingly steep pitches, and irreproachable brakes are needed. They are the kind of hills on which first gear is used whether you are going up or going down. A more picturesque way to Ashburton is by way of Hexworthy and Holne, but in saying it is more picturesque one is merely comparing one piece of perfection with another.

At Ashburton, take the road to Totnes, where if you feel inclined to give your tour variety, you can take the launch to Dartmouth, sending your car round by road via Halwell. On a clear day the Dart is undoubtedly one of the most beautiful streams in Europe. The ferry will take you across to Kingswear from Dartmouth, and your way back to Exeter lies by a charming coast road. Make a point of going through Brixham, as much for the heartening splash of colour of the trawlers as for the view across Tor Bay. The road from Brixham through Paignton and Torquay is unavoidably urban, but beyond to Teignmouth the steepness of the hills saves it. Immediately after Teignmouth the road to Exeter climbs up over Little Haldon down into another typical Devonshire valley, and up once more on to Great Haldon, adjoining the road you started out on at the edge of the great rise.

This run can, of course, be done easily in a day, but properly to appreciate the country you should break it up, staying in one or two of the halting-places. Any number

of varieties of this skeleton outline can be arranged, and it can be richly extended by taking the road from Totnes to Kingsbridge, to Torcross, and along Slapton Sands between the Start and the Mew Stone. The last half of this run through Strete and Stoke Fleming is nothing less than exquisite.

PART III

NORTH OF THE SEVERN

CHAPTER X

HEREFORDSHIRE, MONMOUTHSHIRE, GLOUCESTERSHIRE, WORCESTERSHIRE

FROM the motor-wanderer's point of view, one of the pleasantest and most interesting of England's matchless forests—using the word officially—is the Forest of Dean, west of the River Severn. Except the New Forest, I suppose there is hardly one which complies with the regulations governing forests, in being composed principally of trees. There were trees there once, no doubt, but their numbers have been so reduced, and those herded, as it were, into little clumps here and there, that the word "forest" has really come to mean a big heath. Ashdown, St. Leonards, a large part of the New, and, above all, Dartmoor, are very little more. They are beautiful heaths, it is true, but any "wood" could give them points and a severe beating when it comes to timber.

The Forest of Dean has many acres of beautiful woodland, and certain stretches of it deceive you momentarily into the belief that you are driving through the real thing. On

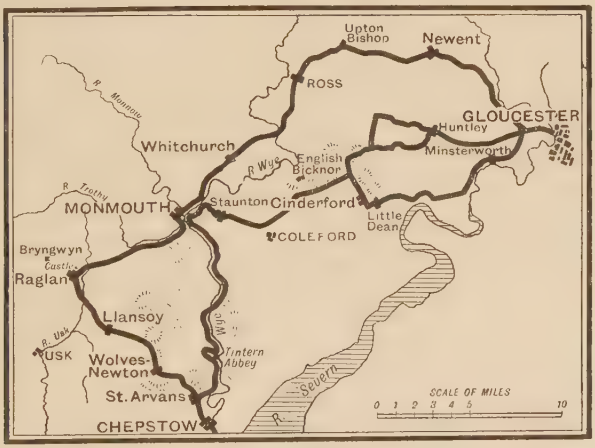
the road between English Bicknor and Mitcheldean, for example, you get vivid impressions of great avenues hewn through regiments of oaks—but they do not last long. A mile, perhaps, more probably half that, and you are out again in the heathland. Not that there is anything to complain of in this. On the contrary, the glimpses you get of the hills through the trees on this side and that, and the blue open world beyond and below your road, make you impatient to be free of the woods, if such a frame of mind be possible.

The Forest of Dean is most happily situated. It is really very modest in size, but it is entirely surrounded by beautiful country. It lies between the Rivers Wye and Severn, bounded on the east by the Cotswold, on the south by the beginnings of the Bristol Channel, on the west by the upper reaches of the Wye, on the north by the Ledbury country, while on a clear day you can see the Welsh and Malvern Hills and all the pleasant high ground between Cheltenham and Malmesbury. Everybody, so to speak, can get to the Forest of Dean, from Wales, from Shropshire, from Worcester, from Bath, and from London.

As a week-end drive from London, counting only Saturday and Sunday, not starting before 10.30 in the morning, not arriving after 6 or 7 p.m., the run to the Forest of Dean and back is one of the best for winter-time I know. To begin with, the road to Gloucester, on the edge of the Forest, is exactly the right sort for cold weather. It is open, straight, and fast, practically all the way from Henley-on-Thames, and between Witney and Cheltenham or as far as Andoversford, if you follow the more direct route, only traffic will reduce the speed of your car, and there is little of that at this time of year. It is a fallacy that high speeds are for warm weather only. There is nothing better calculated to make you forget the keen bite of December air than a series of bursts of really high speed, when your car is running at its best, the road lies straight and empty

before you, and you eat up the grey miles as if they were furlongs.

All along that wonderful road across the Cotswold Hills, by Burford and Northleach, where avenues of stout-hearted beeches do their best to shield you from the gale, and, in hard weather, stand six feet deep in drifted snow, your blood races in tune with your engine, and not even frost avails to dim the splendour of the moment.



Once through Gloucester, take the road to Ross, and thence by Whitchurch to Monmouth. If you have left London by 10.30 in the morning and have not lingered by the way, you should reach Monmouth soon after dark, missing very little that matters, but on no account go farther that night. There is a comfortable hotel, where you can rest in warmth. Make your plans for to-morrow. In summer-time the late evening is the time to do the next fifty miles, but not a yard of them can be missed, and you must wait, in winter-time, for the morning.

You need not make an early start for the Wye Valley road and the Forest, and if you ar away from Monmouth

by half-past ten, you will see all there is to be seen and finish the day very comfortably. Follow the Usk road as far as Raglan, and there turn off to the left on to a hill road, whose roughness and steepness after Llansoy are clean forgotten in the superb views which meet you at the top of Star Hill and keep you company all the way to Devauden and through Chepstow Park Wood. You reach the six hundred to seven hundred feet altitude very quickly, and among those woods and hills you are, for the thousandth time, prepared to swear the world has nothing to show you like them.

At St. Arvans, two miles short of Chepstow, turn to the right, and skirting the hills you have just crossed, come down on to that road by the side of the Wye which is said to have no equal in the British Isles. It needs no description from me, but I hope for your sake, when you follow it on a winter's day, that you will see, as I have done, the morning mist about the foothills with the sunlight above it and the church steeples standing as it were disembodied in it, their weather-vanes in the blue December sky.

Just before Monmouth, when the river is on your left, turn right up a glorious winding hill, twisting through woods, to Staunton. From this or that elbow of that wonderful road you catch glimpses of the roofs and spires of Monmouth sticking up out of the mist like the upperworks and masts of a sunken ship. Then, at the top, you are in the Forest of Dean, well above the river mist, among glades and copses and heathland. Avoid Coleford and Cinderford, and come to Mitcheldean through the woods. You can break off right and left, and reach Gloucester by the north lanes or by Little Dean and the levels of Minsterworth, but you will do better by Huntley.

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It is surprising how few motorists, apart from those who

live near them, realise what a picturesque objective the Malvern Hills make for a week-end run, whether you start from the Worcestershire, the Gloucestershire, or the Herefordshire side. As a range of hills, they are, I suppose, amongst the smallest in the whole of Great Britain, being less than ten miles long from the north to the south point, yet they have an austere picturesqueness for which you must go to Wales to find an equal.

They stand up extraordinarily sheer, especially on the east side. From the upper road, running from Great Malvern towards Ledbury, they give you, on a misty evening, for example, the sensation of being tremendous mountains, so precipitously do their sides drop down to the valley of the Severn. In spite of their small extent the towns and villages about them do not seem to do more than enhance their sturdy appearance. They are bold hills in every sense of the word.

Perhaps on the whole the most picturesque is the eastern side, and those who are aiming for them from the Gloucester district will get the best of them in the following way. The road to Tewkesbury should be followed first, which runs parallel with the Severn and in its course through the levels which run up to the foot of the Cotswold Hills makes an agreeable preparation for your first view of the Malvern Hills. After leaving Tewkesbury you catch sight of them on the left, but you should avoid the temptation of turning off towards them and keep on along the rather winding road through Severn Stoke and Kempsey to Worcester. A road runs parallel with you on the other side of the river, but the latter effectively prevents your reaching it until you have actually entered the city of Worcester, after you have passed Earls Croome.

The run from Worcester to Great Malvern is only a matter of about eight miles, and it should be taken slowly, especially if you are approaching the hills in the evening.

Soon after leaving Powick you will realise what people mean when they say that the Malvern Hills are the most impressive south of the Tweed. I do not say I agree with this rather sweeping statement, but there is no doubt that the view, a few miles away, of the North Hill and Worcester Beacon, standing up some one thousand four hundred feet straight up out of the plain, is very striking. The nearer you approach, especially if there is any mist about, the bigger these hills loom above you until you would be prepared to believe any statement about their height.

The remarkably pleasant drives above and below Great Malvern, along such nice places as Foley Terrace, need no description here, being, in point of fact, part of the town. Yet the motorist who takes his car along them for the first time will be struck again and again by that impression of a town built like a nest against a wall. One of the roads to Ledbury leads you over the edge of that wall, and here again, where it curls round between rocks and comes out on the west side of the hills, you pass in a few seconds from one fine viewpoint to another and, oddly enough, the country on the west side seems totally different from that on the east. Instead of the rich valley of the Severn across which you can look almost upon the orchards of Pershore, you have a splendid glimpse of that warm rich county of Herefordshire, with its red soil, its great woods and smiling hills.

From this really wonderful spot, called, I believe, Wind's Point, just under Hereford Beacon, you drop down into Ledbury and thereafter abandon yourself to one of the most beautiful drives to be had in the Midlands. You follow the first five miles or so of the Hereford road, but, half a mile after Trumpet, you keep straight on instead of turning to the right and climb up over The Wonder and Marcle Hill. It is a fairly tricky business finding and keeping to the right road hereabouts, as every mile or so brings

you to a new deviation. At the end of Marcle Hill you should turn sharp left and then again sharp right, which will bring you down into Much Marcle itself. From here south your road runs through an extremely picturesque valley on the way to Ross.

This can be taken as your turning-point, and the next objective is Bromsash and Lea, close by Mitcheldean-road railway station. Here you can either keep straight on to Gloucester by Huntley, or, a much pleasanter way, turn to the left and make for Mitcheldean among the hills. The first you pass on your right, which is over nine hundred feet high, bears the rich name of Pingry Tump, and is perhaps for that reason alone well worth going to see. After leaving this Tump you drop down through the little foothills to Flaxley Abbey and so come out into the levels through which the last miles of the Severn creep on their leisurely way to the sea. You pass Westbury-on-Severn and Minsterworth where the road runs alongside the river and join the main Ross-Gloucester road about three miles from Gloucester, and so come in sight of the Cotswold country.

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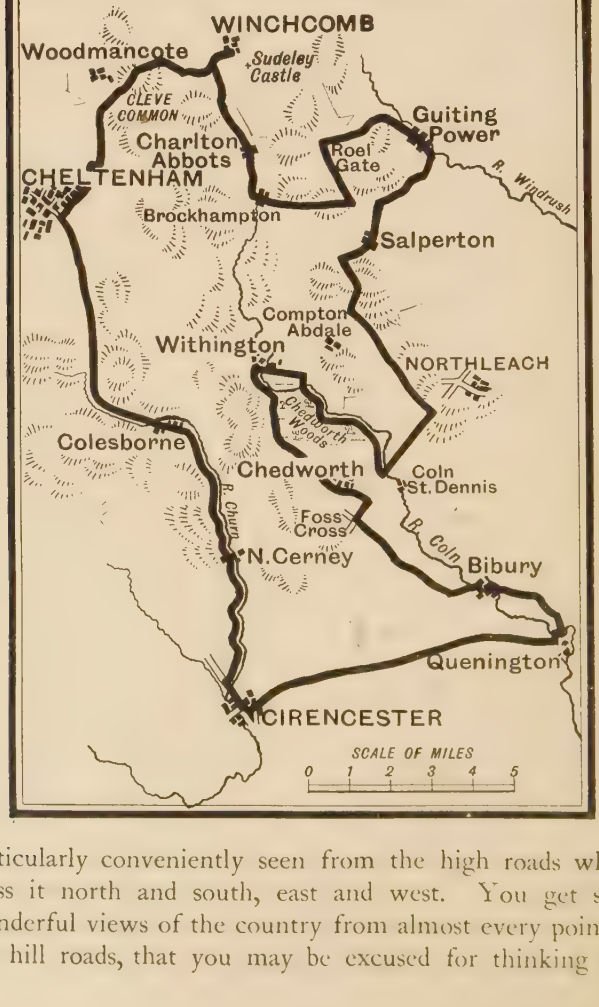
No part of England, within reach of busy towns and itself well populated, has escaped the evil activities of the villa jerry-builder so successfully as the Cotswold country. Its hills and villages, besides being among the most beautiful, are the luckiest in the world. It is almost true to say that for a hundred years nobody has touched either, nothing has been allowed to disfigure those matchless uplands and valleys. So few modern buildings have been put up near those ancient stone houses as to be unnoticeable. If there is a row of red brick and slate on the outskirts of Cirencester, it has been put where it matters least, and you are consoled for it by the reverence which has been shown by the builders of several centuries for Chipping Campden.

To the majority of motor-wanderers from other parts of the world the Cotswold is a wonderful fragment of very old England of the most English kind, which can be



particularly conveniently seen from the high roads which cross it north and south, east and west. You get such wonderful views of the country from almost every point of the hill roads, that you may be excused for thinking you

can see it all on your way from Moreton-in-the-Marsh to Malmesbury, or from Gloucester to Oxford. You do not see the half of it, and what you do see, fine as it is, is far from the best. To get a proper idea of the rare beauty of the Cotswold Hills, you must take to the by-ways, armed with a large-scale map, and forget the passing of time.

Practically anywhere makes a good starting-point for exploring the Cotswold, but I have always a preference for Cirencester, as one can begin with the drive to the outskirts of Cheltenham, a fourteen-mile run which has few equals in the West of England. The road follows the course of the little stream Churn, by North Cerney and Colesborne, winding about among hills and woods which are constantly revealing unsuspected views of some of the fairest English landscape. It runs high, raised on a ridge for the most part, so that you look down upon woodland and across it to great hill-sides rising against the sky.

However little you may be moved by picturesque towns of any size, you will be wise if you halt on Windlass Hill and take a long look at Cheltenham. It looks, as it undoubtedly is, one of the pleasantest towns in England, and it shows itself to advantage when you see it from a seven-hundred-foot hill three miles away. You cannot help envying people who live in so agreeable a place, with such country at their very doors. Your road misses the town, bearing to the right just past Charlton Park, and joining the Stratford-on-Avon road a mile out. Soon after this you climb Cleeve Hill, a most invigorating business, from the top of which you have a view over the Vale of Gloucester which is worth driving a hundred miles to see. In very few places south of the Yorkshire moors are you shown such a superb expanse of country. On a clear day your view is bounded by the Herefordshire Hills, and if these are in shadow, as they often are, they take on the look of a great mountain range fifty miles away.

Just before Winchcombe, half a mile from the village, turn sharp to the right to Charlton Abbots. This gives you another brisk climb up to about eight hundred feet, with yet more great prospects on either hand. On your left, across a little valley, stands Sudeley Castle, lord of a fold in the hills, and, as it were, its own gatekeeper. For it dominates the narrow neck of the odd little vale ringed by hills in an almost perfect circle.

After Charlton Abbots comes Brockhampton, where you turn left, and, after a couple of miles, right to Hawling. Hereabouts you will notice signposts to a variety of "Guitings," Roel and Power and Wood and Temple—a Saxon relic, peculiar, I believe, to just this part of Gloucestershire. Hereabouts, too, you will need to keep a watchful eye on the map, as, although it does not matter in the least, you can very easily lose your chosen way. At Roel Gate you turn right again and describe the circle through Guiting Power south to Salperton, and so come to the main Oxford road near Compton Abdale. Follow it as far as Hangman's Stone, a mile short of Northleach, and there cut south on to the Foss Way, which brings you to Fossbridge, at the foot of a hill not to be despised.

Here you again make a delightful detour, following the road on your right, north through Chedworth Woods to Withington, where you double back by Chedworth Station to Foss Cross, and finish your day among the hidden treasures of the Wold with a visit to Bibury, which claims to be the most picturesque village in the United Kingdom.

CHAPTER XI

WALES

In spite of its small extent, Wales can certainly claim to be one of the richest fields for the motor-explorer who does not mind wide detours and doublings and turnings. Like all hill countries, it is never the same, and you may drive again and again over the same fifty-mile stretch and see it totally different every time. It is not an exaggeration to say that at no minute of any hour on any day can you see any bit of it exactly as it was the last time you saw it. Wales is rich in places you can return to time and again in the hope of recapturing a remembered beauty.

In addition to this, Wales scores very heavily over the character of both her main and by-roads. Her main roads run through some of the best scenery—in proportion, far more than do the main roads of England. Between Milford Haven and Welshpool, Carnarvon and Monmouth, all roads are beautiful roads, passing by some of the very finest scenery in the British Isles. It may be a class A road, and here and there thickly thronged with traffic of the commercial sort, but it shares the hill views almost equally with the by-roads.

Think, for example, of the run east from Brecon to Abergavenny, especially the final drop down into the latter over a real mountain road; of the road from Llandrindod Wells through Rhayader and Llangurig, down to the sea at Aberystwyth. It would be difficult to find main roads to compare with these two stretches.

The lesser roads are, of course, a better objective for the

motorist, if only for their comparative solitude. And that is one of the main reasons why Wales always keeps its lovers. It is seldom, or at any rate, to be on the safe side, I had better say, until this year it has been seldom, that the secondary roads in the heart of Wales have been uncomfortably crowded.

Here is the sketch of a particularly pleasant Welsh week-end run for the motorist who lives in Nottingham, Leicester, London, or near the South Coast, who can give two and a half days to the cruise.

Taking Hereford as the starting-point for the Welsh roads, begin by heading west to Willersley, and there turning left on to the main Brecon road, through Hay. Immediately you leave the valley of the Wye and get into the higher land, you are amongst the real Welsh hills. On your left are the Black Mountains by Talgarth, in front of you the fine bulk of Mynydd Eppynt, and on your right the hills towards New Radnor.

At the junction where stands the Three Cocks Inn you take the right hand road and so continue to follow the valley of the Wye. All this run in to Builth is magnificent, especially in the early morning and the evening. If it can be managed it is an excellent plan so to arrange your day that you do the bulk of your driving early and late, leaving the middle of the day for rest and sight-seeing. In the morning you are unlikely to meet any traffic worth mentioning, and the early hours in the Welsh hills are the best of the twenty-four.

At Builth it is best to abandon the main road to Rhayader, and take the left-hand one to Llandrindod Wells and Newtown. There are some very fine hills on either hand, such as Rhiw Gwraidd and Camllo Hill, and the road following the tortuous course of the River Ithon, by Llanddewi, Ystradenny, and Llanbister, has a great charm.

At Newtown you meet the River Severn and, turning to the left, follow it some twenty-four miles to Cemmaes

Road, where you reach the Dovey Valley. This stretch, again, by Carno and Llanbrynmair, is a fine example of a Welsh hill road, and there is not a mile of it without really striking scenery. Turn northwards up the valley of the Dovey, past Cemmaes, to Mallwyd. Here the road forks, and the right-hand turn should be taken. The left-hand fork is well worth following if time is no object. It leads to Dolgelley, and, for the purpose of this tour, means retracing your wheel-tracks, but the scenery over the pass of Dinas Mawddwy and on the run down into the town is superb.

From Mallwyd, going east, you follow the River Banwy. There is a very sharp bend at an altitude of six hundred and forty-one feet about three miles out of Mallwyd, and you continue to climb for the next three miles till you reach Bwlch-y-Fedwen at close upon a thousand feet. Across the hills on your left is Lake Vyrnwy, a fine piece of water, which you can visit by turning off at Pen-y-Bont, just after Garthbeibio. The road makes the complete circuit of the lake, and the necessary detour is only a matter of thirty miles.

You conclude the run through Llanfair and Welshpool, striking south after the latter town to Ludlow and Kington, and arriving at your jumping-off place, Willersley, six miles beyond the latter.

The distance of the round trip from Hereford back to Willersley is about two hundred miles (with the detour to Dolgelley, about two hundred and twenty), and you will find every one of them beautiful.

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Pilgrimages are of all kinds, whether they are undertaken afoot, on horseback, by train, or by car, but they are not, in general, to be confused with journeys. The difference between them lies in the fact that for a pilgrimage to be successful, you must arrive, while the real heart of a journey

is in the travel, and not in the reaching of a destination. So, properly speaking, all good motoring should be a skilful blend of the two. You should start out with a confessed object in view, but you should also be constantly grateful that you are still on the way and have not yet arrived. For even in

motor vagabondage, such as most of us love, you cannot escape, in the act of arrival, a depressing feeling of having come to the inelastic end of a pleasant adventure. It may very well be that this is why we are sometimes apt to look sourly upon the things we have travelled far to see. They are like the end of the holidays, and like the final "bust" on the last night of the holidays, they sometimes fail to cheer.

Sometimes, but not always. There are pilgrimages

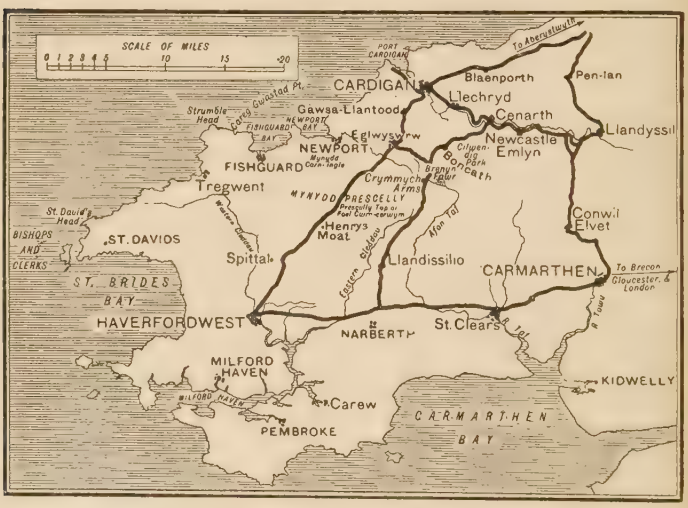
which are made by perfect journeys; and magnificent journeys, full of rich adventure, which turn out, in their splendid ends, to be wonderful pilgrimages. That is what is called the Luck of the Road. A potent, dread, but, taking him by and large, a generous deity.

The Luck of the Road has important dominions in South Wales. It is, practically all of it, a country entirely after his own heart. If you feel like fast travel, whirling through valleys, past historic towns by beautiful rivers, the main roads between such a border town as Monmouth, for example, and Cardigan Bay or Milford Haven, will let you average shameful speeds. If you yearn after the rough, you have only to take to the by-roads of Cardiganshire and Pembrokeshire. You will find on them mud, stones, steep gradients, and holes in reckless profusion, and your average speed will be shameful in another way. If you desire objects for pilgrimages, you have come to the proper country. For whether you believe in them or not, you cannot deny that you will go practically anywhere to see ghosts. And parts of South Wales are noted for mountains which are said to be simply full of them.

It is not for me to say, even by daylight, whether I believed in those ghosts when I skidded nervously past their hill fastnesses. I have a respect for things I don't understand, and of which I am therefore afraid. But you will not have to go far on my ghost road to find true believers, and it will be as well for you not to mock at their tales. You may not believe in the Elementals of what I choose to call Hill One, nor in the Ancient Britons of Hill Two, nor in the Goat-People of Hill Three. There are all sorts of wise persons who, safe in London, scoff at the idea of dead Egyptian kings objecting, in a very material manner, to the desecration of their last resting-places. But you will be wise to keep your preconceived notions to yourself until you have put that border behind you and are well on the way

home, past the petrol-pumps of the Bath or the Birmingham roads. This part of Wales is a mighty odd place.

The Ghost Mountains are in the extreme south-west corner, and you reach them by two ways only—either from the north, by Aberystwyth and Cardigan, or from Carmarthen, and it is better to make a circular tour of it. Taking Cardigan as your starting-point, then, you follow the New-



port road as far as Gawsa-Llantood, where you bear to the left to Eglwyswrw—a local spelling, I was told, of the ordinary French word *église*. Here you begin to climb and, ghosts or no ghosts, you have spread before your delighted eyes such wild moorland scenery as more than repays you for a two-hundred-and-seventy-mile drive from London. The peak of your climb is Foel Eryr, a spur of the mountain called Mynydd Prescelly, some one thousand seven hundred feet above the sea. Just before you reach the summit you will see on your right hand a lesser hill, called Carningle, where, the tale runs, the sea itself rises,

at high tide, through a spring at the top. The nearest beach is at Newport Sands, at least two miles away and a thousand feet lower. I am not prepared to explain this odd behaviour of the ocean. I merely record.

Farther west lies Strumble Head, upon which, or rather, upon Careg Gwastad Point, the French landed, according to report, in 1797. This is a fact concealed from me by the late Richard Green and other companions of the school-room. It appears to have been quite a business, something after the style of Waterloo. For, at the house of a great lady, as it were the Duchess of Richmond, there was a ball that night, and revelry, and when the alarm was given the wigged gentlemen ran forth, sword in hand, and bore themselves very bravely despite the handicap of evening clothes. I cannot believe that the French who landed were of the stuff of ghosts, else it would not be printed upon the map, nor would there be descendants of the hostess and her guests to reassure you.

You reach the flat again near Haverfordwest and turn eastwards along the Carmarthen road as far as the junction with the Tenby road, where you bear to the left and face again another part of the mysterious mountains. You climb up from Llandissilio to Crymmych Arms and, under the shadow of Brenyn Fawr, to Boncath and the most ancient bridge at Cenarth on the Cardigan-Newcastle-Emlyn-Carmarthen road.

Not for anything would I particularise those ghost hills. If you go the way I have you will see them, and you can, if you are that way inclined, leave the car and climb up their sides. Whether you will find company there or not, whether you will enjoy yourself, whether you will be seen again, I make no guess. I will be no party to your ventures. I do not believe in ghosts, elementals, or other terrors. I am merely afraid of them. So you must ask your way to the places where the first people of Britain still live, where

Pan reigns, where the rocks and boulders drive you from the hill-sides. But, whatever your convictions, lose no time in driving to the fine country over which the Ghost Mountains rear their "unked" heads.

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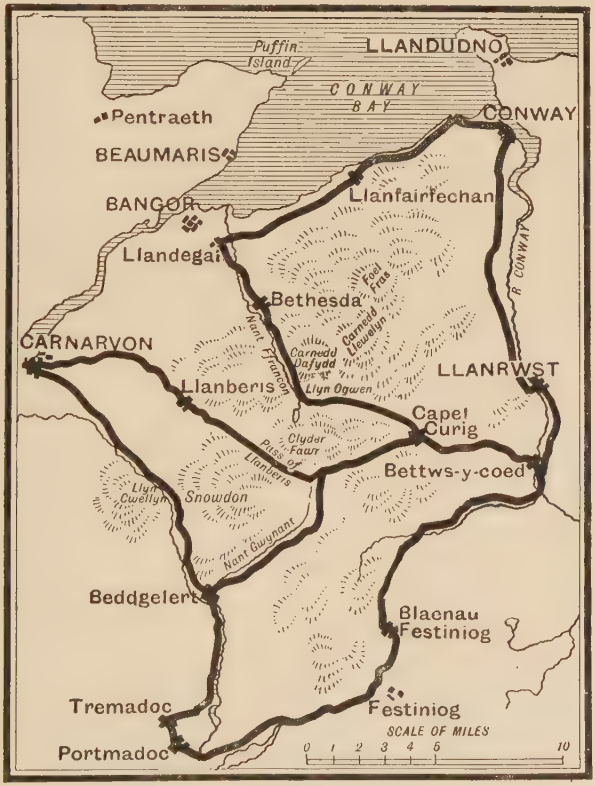
Of all times in the year I always think early autumn by far the best for motor-touring in hill districts. It is only natural, when spring brings us a merciful release from the black days of January and February, or when such a summer as we revelled in last year comes to remind us of what our strange climate can do when it pleases, that we of the open road should elect each, in turn, as the cream of the year. Even in the darkest depths of the foulest winter we get a week or two when, if only from sheer gratitude, we give the short bleak days a place of honour in the months.

Yet autumn can never be any but the best for the motor wanderer. It is not only because of the glories of colour which transform the face of the country, or the more settled weather, but because the very air, exhilarating, fresher than in spring, blood-tingling, lets us see old and new loveliness alike in a radiant clarity known to no other months. Every corner of the land is lit up by this enchanted light of autumn, but none so splendidly as the hills, and of these, north, south, or west, none as are those of the Snowdon range.

You would be put to it to choose a better week-end touring ground than the valleys between Conway Bay and Cardigan Bay for early October. The haze of summer is gone, the gales of autumn not yet come, and those glorious peaks and lakes and valleys lie bathed in a crystal glow which shows you how much more beautiful they are than you had ever guessed.

You must be prodigal of time, content to travel far while making small progress. You can easily drive from Chester round Snowdon to Portmadoc in a day; but that is to miss it all. Your course must be a perfect example of a zigzag.

You have to make your way round three sides of three sets of peaks, climb and descend some four passes, and give no thought at all to your destination or the hour of your arrival



there. You will be driving through some of the finest hill-country in the kingdom, and not the Alps themselves demand more reverence.

The Snowdon hills lie very happily convenient for motorists living anywhere between Liverpool, Shrewsbury, Worcester, and Brecon, and a cruise through them can be

begun and ended at almost any point of the rough square they occupy. Perhaps they show their best sides to the wanderer from the north—you will be quite willing to believe the contrary at the end of your tour, and make sure of it by turning round and retracing your way — and so I give the itinerary a beginning at Conway, and the road along the bay side, through Llanfairfechan, to Llandegai, near Bangor. Above you tower a noble chain of four peaks, all of them over three thousand feet high, Foel Tras, Foel Grach, Carnedd Llewelyn, and Carnedd Dafydd, heralds of great kings. At Llandegai you turn to the left on to the Capel Curig road, better known, perhaps, as the Holyhead road, and as you climb the pass up to the falls of Llyn Ogwen, you see them falling into line behind the mighty Craig-dhu, which dominates the lake.

Your road keeps pretty high as far as Capel Curig (indeed, you seldom drive at less than one thousand feet), where you should turn to the right along the shore of Lake Mymbyr and skirt the edge of Glyder-fach, a great hill with sides like a pyramid. At Pen-y-Gwryd bear to the right and you find yourself at the top of the famous Llanberis pass with Snowdon itself in front of you. The next twenty-odd miles run round two sides of a triangle, the whole of which is filled by Snowdon and its fellows. On a bright October day the run down the pass, by the shores of the two little lakes, to Cwmy-glo, is one of the most beautiful imaginable. Those mountains are very well named the dark Welsh hills. Against a clear autumn sky you will find a thousand dusky tones among their crevices and razor-sharp outlines. They are dark, but very much alive.

You see their western sides as you follow the easy climb up from Carnarvon past Llan Cwellyn to Beddgelert, and you will have a job of it to recognise them again. It may be imagination, but it always seems to me that they are much less severe from the Cwellyn side. At Beddgelert you

have the choice of returning to Conway along the third side of the Snowdon triangle, through the vale of Gwynant, Capel Curig, Bettws-y-Coed, and Llanrwst; or of keeping south through Portmadoc and then east along the vale of Festiniog and up to Roman Bridge station and Dolwyddelen, and so to Bettws-y-Coed. There is no question as to the course you should follow. You must do both, going north to Capel Curig, round by Bettws-y-Coed to Festiniog, and so through the vale of Gwynant again. You cannot afford to miss either road even at the expense of covering one of them twice. Nor is it to be regarded as expense, for it is a hill road which never looks the same.

At Bangor you find the last stage of the Holyhead road, the greatest of all our famous roads, as I think, not only because it is a single-purpose road undeterred by places like Coventry and Birmingham and Shrewsbury which might so easily have tacked themselves on to its proper title, but because of its superbly dramatic finish. Straight through England and Wales it runs to the Irish Sea, and in its last stages it has to climb over the most glorious part of the Welsh mountains, cross an arm of the sea, and, at the end, the island of peace. Its career is unsurpassed by any, its climax, over those hills, across those straits, and through that enchanting island, overflowing repayment for the whole of its two hundred and forty-odd miles from Charing Cross. Leave out two hundred of those miles, if you like, and cut off the last half-dozen, and the actual end on the island of Holyhead, and still the Holyhead road is supremely justified because it takes you to Anglesey.

It is an island of peace in every sense of the word. On the northern and eastern sides there are little roads in plenty, with enough villages to bear you pleasant company, and enough moorland and woodland to balance them. You are never too solitary, and you have forgotten what anything remotely resembling a crowd looks like. You are alone

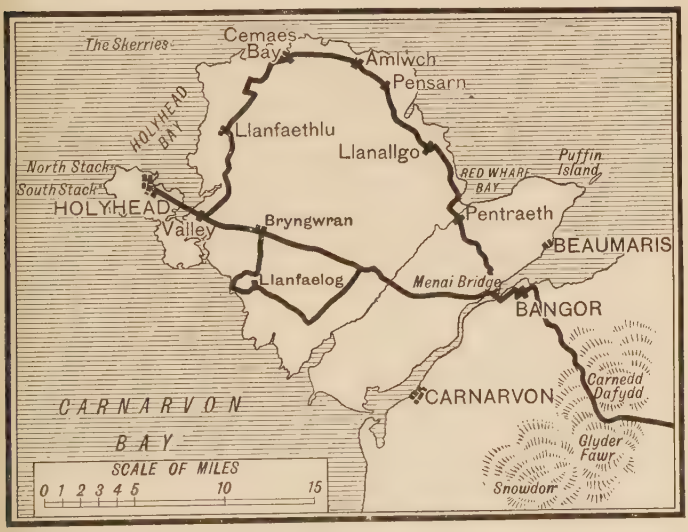
if you wish, and yet a mile or two will bring you to pleasant-mannered folk busy about their own affairs on field and road. I do not know whether Holyhead is a town or, like Titipu, reduced to the rank of a village, but at any rate, it is the largest thing of its kind near the island of peace, and it is not in the least too large. You will like to think that it is there, with its ships and its harbour, and the end of the great road within sight of the Stacks. It is the right thing in the right place, and, in any case, it is on an island of its own. It is not an Anglesey town.

The way I prefer to find the peace of Anglesey is to follow the Holyhead Road from the Menai Bridge to Valley. This stretch is perhaps the less picturesque side, but you can always take any of the eight little side roads, which lead down to the coves on Carnarvon Bay. If such things interest you, you have Lake Maelog, near Rhosneigr, which is reputed to be the windiest place in the kingdom, and you can rejoin the main road at Bryngwran. At Valley, turn to the right and take the road by Llanfaethlu and Cemmaes Bay to Amlwch, and so south again to the blue Straits. It is a wonderful little road for the easy-going, unhurried motorist. It is a constant succession of little rises and falls and windings and "straights," exactly like any big trans-European highway in miniature. But with this important difference, that it is marvellously well placed. It is always exactly at the right height above the sea, so that at every other turn, as you pass a wood, or cross a moor, or come out on the crest of a hillock, you have the sea stretching, as it seems, all round you. You feel that you are missing nothing of the scenery.

And it is exquisite scenery, curving bays with their sandy beaches (not shingles, you will be relieved to notice) sweeping up to the feet of the little bluffs giving way, in their turn, to common and spinney and moor. Grey stone walls, bright with lichen and ivy, whole jungles of fuchsias, capes, and

headlands, with now and then a faraway glimpse of the big landmark, the Stack, behind you, or of Great Ormes Head across Conway Bay, or, much nearer, of the hills beyond Red Wharf Bay. Never was there a road so short with so much variety in it.

From Amlwch the road passes Pensarn and Llanallgo, and then swerves down near the beaches by Red Wharf.



Soon after Pentraeth you rise again, not much by aneroid, but enough for the purpose. For from the highest point of the road you suddenly get a view you are not likely to forget. It is of the Menai Straits below you, with white yachts dotting their winding length, of the first hills behind Bangor, and at last, towering up into the sky, of Snowdon and his big brothers Glyder Fawr and Carnedd Dafydd. Between the last two the Holyhead Road comes down to the Straits from Bettws-y-Coed and Capel Curig, a mountain pass which can look as darkly forbidding on an English

summer's day as any in the Alps or Pyrenees. You would swear they were three times their height, these strange hills, and it is with the real motor-mountaineer's thrill that you face your car at the pass you must cross to get home. The peace of Anglesey lies behind your shoulder, a very insistent voice among these wind-swept boulders.

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Motoring people who live in the industrial Midlands have much to compensate them. The motor-cruiser whose life lies, let us say, in the Birmingham district, has means of a wonderful escape from his surroundings which the Londoner is denied. You would imagine, on looking at the map, that he would have to go very far afield to get free of smoke, and would have to pass through or close to many very disagreeable places before he could win through to the freedom of the real open; but as a matter of fact he has one of the finest playgrounds in England within a day's drive.

This is that part of the world of which Radnor Forest is the centre, a country which, like so many other out-of-the-way spots in England, seems to have retained an extraordinary air of privacy. Radnorshire is bordered by much-frequented counties like Shropshire, Herefordshire, and Montgomeryshire, but in spite of that and of its nearness to big towns, it seems to have remained practically untouched by the swiftly growing road crowds. Like other odd corners of this marvellous England, it also has its own peculiarities of scenery. Geographically speaking, it might almost be regarded as part of Shropshire or Brecknockshire, but as soon as you get amongst its hills, you see at once that for no reason that you can describe, everything looks quite different. One of the best runs in its borders, round Radnor Forest itself, shows you a kind of hill which in shape, disposal, and colour (especially colour) reminds you of nothing else in the British Isles.

There are little bits of the Pyrenees, of the Auvergne, and of the Cevennes, all mixed up in a delightful picture, but there is mighty little to remind you even of Wales—in spite of the exceptionally Welsh place-names which abound.

Here is the best way of seeing the best of Radnorshire on a long spring day's run. Supposing you to be coming from the Midland towns, your best plan is to go through Worcester and Bromyard to Leominster, which is in the valley lying at the foot of the Radnorshire hills. Your first objective is Kington, which may be taken as the gate of this delightful little country. As you approach the town you see on your left the immense mass of the Black Mountain, which looks, on any but the clearest day, so very much higher than its modest two thousand odd feet. Immediately after Kington you enter a narrow valley which leads you to New Radnor, the beginning of the road which circles Radnor Forest. Keep to the left, but after Llanfihangel-nant-Melan, bear always to the right. Here you climb up to very respectable heights like one thousand two hundred and forty-six feet, and throughout the remainder of the drive you are very seldom lower than seven hundred. At Penybont you turn again to the right and skirt the north edge of the forest, through Bleddfa, turning half left at the foot of Bailey Hill to Knighton. Those fifteen miles will show you the first of those characteristic hills which I have so signally failed to describe. You have not exactly hairpin bends, but sharp turns in a road cut out of the side of the hills, and as you climb up the various little passes, and get those marvellous views over the Welsh mountains, you notice one definite quality about them—they seem to smell of the open sea. How they manage to do this I cannot guess, but there is no question about it. Something of an epicure in mountain air, I have never come across anything like the air of the Radnorshire hills, except possibly in mid-Atlantic.

From Knighton, you continue north over a fairly precipitous road, which is as lonely as you may wish. On the day I made my explorations, I met nothing but ponies, and there was no sound in the valleys but the voice of running water. You climb on to Bishop's Castle, and being careful not to take the recommended road to Shrewsbury, by Church Stretton, keep on by the mountain road which lies between Stiperstones and Long Mynd Hills. It is a road of which villages seem to have fought shy, for until you get to a tiny hamlet called Cothercott, there is no village actually on it. Norbury, a very picturesque little spot, stands in a superior manner on a height about a mile away from it. All this road, which runs at a height of between six hundred and twelve hundred feet, is a typical mountain way, and you would be wise to drive with some care. Some of the corners are blind, and there are unexpected water-splashes, notably one particularly dangerous one immediately after Cothercott, which lies across the road at the bottom of a long, steep, winding hill, hidden until the last moment.

Just after Cothercott comes the homeward turn, and you take the road to the right through Church Pulverbatch to Stapleton, and make your way home either eastwards through Church Stretton and Much Wenlock, or northwards through Shrewsbury. Do not expect to average more than a very moderate speed throughout this drive. In the first place, you will certainly not want to for fear of missing a thousand beautiful things to see, and, in the second place, you will find any such attempt decidedly dangerous. I found that by driving at a comfortable speed, which enabled me to see all I wanted to see, I was able to make the round I have described from New Radnor to Church Stretton in three hours.

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It is one of the eternal mysteries of this ancient England that no number of industrial cities of the largest kind, plan

them as thickly as you wish, seems to make any real difference to the high country around them. The levels, it is true, are often swamped by the outrush of bricks and mortar, but the English hills hold their own stolidly against all attacks.

There are few ranges of hills so English or so close to manufacturing centres as those of Shropshire, and if you want a proof of the sublime manner in which the beautiful places of this country can hold themselves aloof from the disfigurement of the daily jerry-builder, you cannot do better than take your car for a week-end tour among them. There are places by the Long Mynd, by Wenlock Edge, and round the Clees, where things must be as they have been for the last few centuries. Wolverhampton and Birmingham lie only just over the horizon, but that horizon more than suffices. Nowhere amongst these hills are you led to expect anything in the shape of a town, unless it be an ancient stronghold like Bridgnorth.

A tour among the Shropshire hills is very much a business of doubling back and forth, of running a great many miles in order to cover a very short distance, but to my mind that makes one of its principal charms. The Shropshire hills have any number of faces, and the roads which run amongst them are most happily disposed, so that in an hour's run you may see all sides of old friends.

Week-end cruises between Shrewsbury, Ludlow, Kidderminster, and Wellington can be planned in an almost infinite variety, but one that I can particularly recommend is the following. Starting from Shrewsbury, the road by Leebotwood is followed as far as Church Stretton, where you should turn off to the left up Hazler Hill to Hope Bowdler, and the Much Wenlock road. Here you get your first proper view of Wenlock Edge, and it is an undoubted temptation to climb up over it and cut the run short. It is not a course to be recommended however, as, apart from the scenery you miss by skirting the edge of the long knife-like hill

you are quite likely to find yourself on roads which, in winter time, are anything but pleasant to navigate. It is wiser to carry straight on to Much Wenlock and then turn sharp right under the south of the Edge by Brockton and along the River Corve to Pedlar's Rest. This Corve Dale is one of the most secluded spots in all the Midlands. The railway passes its western end at Craven Arms, and between there and Much Wenlock you are in a countryside whose transport depends wholly upon roads.

At Pedlar's Rest you take the Ludlow road, and leaving the town on your right (you skirt it), you have the choice of two roads. The left-hand one runs between Brown Clee and Clee Hill to Cleobury North, and so to Bridgnorth. On a fair day this is a very pretty run, and although you are yourself sometimes as high up as over eight hundred feet, the two famous hills, one on either hand, look decidedly impressive. Yet, if you have the time, you would be better advised to take the second way, which follows the right-hand road at the fork about two miles from Ludlow to Clee Hill, on the south side of the very respectable small mountain of that name. From Angel Bank you have a fine climb up to some one thousand three hundred feet above sea-level, and for the next two miles the road follows the lower rim of the hill, dropping down eventually to Cleobury Mortimer. There are not very many places outside Yorkshire, the Cumberland Fells, and Devonshire where you may drive your car on a decent road over the thousand-foot mark, and that is one of the many minor reasons why you should find this tour of the Shropshire hills attractive at any time of the year.

From Cleobury Mortimer the road skirts Wyre Forest to Bewdley, where you cross the River Severn and join the Kidderminster-Bridgnorth road at Franche. Turn here to the left and carry straight on to Bridgnorth, through Quatt. Your approach to that strong place, which was so

remarkably useful to various kings of England in the Middle Ages, is one of the most picturesque imaginable. The ancient town literally frowns down upon you, and you start the climb up into its twisted streets with something not unlike the expectation of receiving the usual welcome afforded to invaders—red-hot shot, or boiling lead, or something suitable of that kind. Bridgnorth may not have been regarded by its enemies as beautiful, but it is certainly a town which refuses to be disregarded.

The road back to Shrewsbury lies through Ironbridge, and in the Valley of the Severn, under the Wrekin.

PART IV

BY MERSEY, TWEED, AND HUMBER

CHAPTER XII

NOTTINGHAMSHIRE, DERBYSHIRE, YORKSHIRE, WESTMORELAND

THERE is a part of the map of Great Britain which is very apt to depress the motorist in search of a pleasant cruise. The patch of industry bounded on the north by Preston and Leeds, and on the south by Birmingham and Stafford, halves the width of England, as we all know who try occasionally to find another way to Scotland except by the Great North Road. Admirable in their own sphere, places like the Potteries, Sheffield, Manchester, Bolton, and Bradford are places to which a very wide berth should be given by the roadfarer.

Yet in the very heart of this motoring No Man's Land there is a really delightful stretch of country, where motor-cruising can be done in proper comfort, provided you are a little careful about planning the run. The people in Buxton and the Peak district and in the north of Nottinghamshire can make a delightful short tour to each other's countries, and, in doing it, go through a wonderful variety of scenery. For example, taking Newark as a starting-

point for the west-bound Midland motorist, Buxton itself makes an excellent objective and turning-point of a tour during which the traveller will never be more than a dozen miles or so from industrial towns, and never see so much as a wisp of their smoke. Certain towns must be passed, but none of them is intolerable, or what is far worse, large.

On leaving Newark, on the Ollerton road, the first main turning to the left should be taken to Mansfield. About six miles from this town you cross the road which comes down along the side of Sherwood Forest, and the romantically-minded can be making a detour along here up to Ollerton and back to Mansfield, reviving memories of Robin Hood and the Sheriff of Nottingham. Indeed, a great part of this tour is in the outlaw's country. From Mansfield the road rises by Robin Hood's Downs and Annersley over Kirkby Forest, dropping down again into the valley at Ripley. Here your way to Belper by Ambergate describes more than half a circle, and all roads to the right must be firmly refused. From Belper the more picturesque way to Buxton is by Ashbourne and Leek, as it is on the Leek Road that you get that wonderful drive over Axe Edge, standing up one thousand seven hundred feet. This must be one of the highest main roads in the country. An alternative road, however, which has points of its own, is by Matlock-Bath and Hartington, keeping along the heights through Hurdlow into Buxton itself. This outward journey will be for the new-comer something in the nature of an exploring expedition, as the finding of the right ways are not easy without a large-scale map. But it is for that reason, amongst others, that it will be found unexpectedly attractive.

The drive home from Buxton is a very picturesque one. The road keeps close to the River Wye as far as Bakewell, and for a good many miles you are running through a really exquisite valley. At Bakewell you have two alternatives; the first, to turn to the left up to Baslow, and so to Chester-

field; the second, to keep on down the valley of the Wye, past Haddon Hall, as far as Rowsley, where you are faced with startling suddenness with one of the steepest climbs in England. This is, I understand, reputed to have a gradient of one in five. Even if this figure is an exaggeration, you will be inclined to consider it an understatement as you follow that apparently precipitous path to the skies between the tall banks and hedges. From the top you have a fine prospect of the surrounding moors and of the Nottinghamshire levels beyond, and it is worth while making a pause here to enjoy it. Presently, you come in sight of Chesterfield, dominated by its church of the strangely leaning spire. I believe I am right in saying that it does actually lean; but I know that there is no question but that the average new-comer to it, after staring his eyes out on the phenomenon, begins to disbelieve in it and to take what he vainly expects will be betraying photographs.

Leaving Chesterfield, you follow the road to Worksop. This is no ornament to the countryside, but it is comparatively small and quickly got over. About two miles before you reach Worksop a road to the right leads past Welbeck Abbey, and this way home can be followed if you are in a hurry, passing again through Ollerton. Myself, however, I prefer to carry on as far as East Retford and finish a tour of many windings and turnings, of hills and dales, by twenty miles of the Great North Road, where, as a general rule, your car may be allowed to stretch herself. It is not because the Great North Road just here is any way beautiful, but because those twenty miles make such an admirable contrast to what has gone before.

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A South Devon friend, planning a run to Scotland, once asked me to show him the way there by the dales. His was a pleasant order to carry out, as he never cares where he goes

nor how long it takes, so long as he sees the best of what there is to be seen. He stipulated that as few main roads as possible be indicated. A proper motor-tramp, in fact.

I envied him that drive north. He spent wonderful days among those hills and dales before he crossed the Border. That stretch of moorland which lies almost across the neck of England is one of the few places left to us which are both beautiful and solitary. Even in the height of summer I have driven an hour or more, on a glorious afternoon, without meeting even a shepherd, far less another motor-car. I do not believe there are twenty miles of road anywhere else in the United Kingdom of which you can say as much. They are very fortunate, the Yorkshire dales.

The Devon man was told that he must endure the Great North Road as far as Wetherby, where his course to Scotland lay west through Harrogate. If he demurred at this, I never heard of it. He is a southron, and therefore, easy-going. Besides, he had little to complain of.

There is one good thing to be said of the flat, sober country between Newark and Boroughbridge, and that is that it makes an excellent introduction to the hills. After fifty or sixty miles of orderly parkland, with great houses and avenues here and there, and all the evidences of long-settled urbanity, decorous, a shade self-conscious, a bluff hill like Greenhow or Great Whernside, shouldering up into the sky, where the air blows razor sharp, is hailed like an old friend making you welcome to great open wind-swept country where a historical avenue of perfect trees would not live a week.

Harrogate makes an excellent place to start for the moors from, having Blubberhouses within a few miles of the town. For myself, I should avoid the orthodox route to Bolton Bridge or Ripley, and, if the condition of the road allowed it, turn north at Blubberhouses and cross the moor to Greenhow, reaching the Pateley Bridge-Skipton road

near Keld Houses. You miss the fun of scaling the apparently perpendicular street in Pateley which carries you on to Greenhow, but you get more open country. It would be wise, however, to make inquiries in Blubberhouses as to your chances on the less-used road.

From Keld Houses, where, at one thousand three hundred odd feet above the sea, you are convinced you are at least three thousand, drop down to Appletreewick and follow the river through an enchanting valley, past Barden Tower, to Bolton Abbey. Hereafter you must resign yourself to lower levels as you pass through Skipton and Settle, but you are never unaware of the hills, whose mighty heads top your every outlook. Kirkby Lonsdale is your next objective, which also marks the turning-point of your hill-drive, and you turn north again on to the Kirkby Stephen road by the River Rawthey, between Bow Fell, The Calf, and Wild Boar Fell. These are good North Country names, with some stuff in them, but what would you make of Penyghent, fifteen miles east of you? Is not this a serious case of trespass, even of border-raiding?

At Kirkby Stephen begins the best of your Yorkshire drive. Start by taking the road to the right, which takes you to Askrigg and Leyburn. Not so wild or exposed as some of its neighbours, it is nevertheless an unforgettable road of hill and dale and river. It is, in fact, Wensleydale itself, and a notable run. There are two roads, one on either side of the river, the northern one taking you to Askrigg and the southern through Hawes to Bainbridge and Aysgarth. I like the latter better (they are generally within sight of each other), because you can stop in the very ancient village of Bainbridge, surely the model from which all North English hamlets were built.

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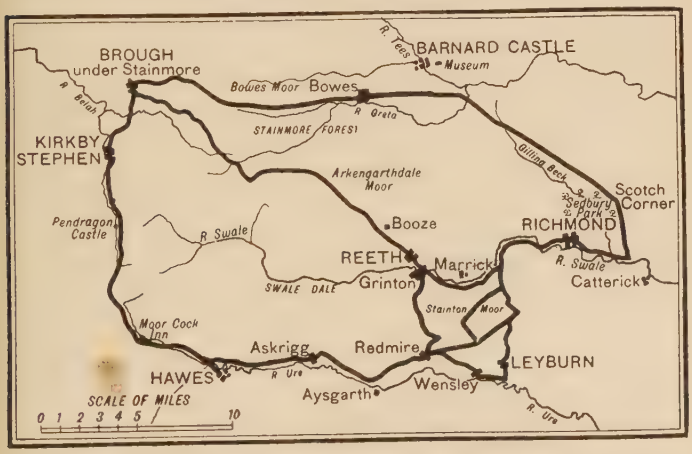
There is a stretch of moorland road north of the Swale

which, I think, must be unique, at all events in England. For some thirty miles there is only one village, and, so far as my recollection goes, only two inhabited houses. This is on the road between Brough and Richmond. Between Brough and Marrick, the only village you will notice is Reeth, and I think the two inhabited houses are both inns. There is a drive in the form of a figure eight, over the moors of the Swale, which it is the first duty of every motor owner with the wander-spirit properly developed to explore. Even if he lives in London, he should make up his mind to cover the two hundred odd miles which lie between him and the beginning of this wonderful cruise, and to put up with the tedium of the same two hundred miles drive back again after he has had his magic day. England is full of wonderful places, and even of those who know her best and discover new wonders every year, not many, I think, can show us much to rival the hill roads which cross the moors between Brough, Barnard Castle, Leyburn, and Bow Fell.

It does not matter very much at which end you begin this figure of eight, so long as you drive south-east from Brough and not north-west. Supposing Catterick Bridge, on the Great North Road, to be your starting-point, as it would be for the Londoner, you drive north to Scotch Corner and Greta Bridge. Here you turn to the left towards Bowes, and begin the long pull up over a magnificent moorland road. You rise from about four hundred feet at Greta Bridge to nearly one thousand five hundred feet in the middle of the moors. It is not, of course, a by-road, but it is the kind of main road which, even in these crowded days, is quite inoffensive. At all events, it must have very few rivals as a road of wide outlook.

At Brough you turn to the left in the village street and, at the end of half a mile, turn sharp to the left again on the road to Barras Station. Your way lies under a railway bridge at this latter point, round an exceedingly sharp and

very steep bend, for which it is as well to be prepared, as it bursts upon you with disconcerting suddenness. Starting at an altitude of about seven hundred feet, where you cross the beck Argill, you rise swiftly to one thousand one hundred, one thousand three hundred, one thousand five hundred, and one thousand six hundred feet. You are now on what I suppose is the longest empty road in England, and for the next twenty-five miles the vast expanse of rolling moors



engulfs you like a chip swallowed up in the Atlantic. The road is narrow, and in places rough, and here and there it must be treated with considerable respect. It has a habit, without the slightest warning, of plunging down the side of a gully at an angle of one in five, or worse, twisting round the sharpest sort of hairpin bend, crossing the beck at the bottom at the most awkward angle, and shooting up the other side of the gully in the same sort of way. Your car must be a good climber, and your brakes above suspicion, as both driving and stopping powers of no mean order are liable to be called for without a second's warning.

The whole of this drive is one which you can never

forget; but perhaps the best of it is over Arkengarthdale Moor, where you reach your highest altitude. It is soon after this that you come across the only side-road worthy of the name. It lies to your left, crossing Hope Moor, and is to be looked out for, as such sign-posting as there is is extremely local and misleading. You should leave it and keep to the right, along the original road, which eventually leads you to Reeth.

After Reeth, you enter Swaledale, which is certainly one of the most beautiful valleys you are likely to come across in a year's drive. Comparisons, especially when it is a question of English scenery, are futile, but you will be compelled to see an affinity between this dale and the valley of the Wye. The contrast between the gracious beauty of the river, with its pools and bends and rapids, all enclosed in deep woods, gleaming with young larches and birches, and the stark moors, with their jutting scarps of red rock, frowning down on either side of the valley, forms a great conclusion to such a stretch of scenery as one is not often lucky enough to see. The run between Marrick and Richmond looks unreal after the wind-swept emptiness of the moors.

To complete the figure of eight, you must join the Askrigg road, and you can do this either direct from Richmond, over Barden Moor, to Leyburn, or you can return to Marrick or Reeth, and come down on to the road at the same place. The run from Scarthwick, through Askrigg, and past the Moorcock Inn, and Pendragon Castle, to Kirkby Stephen, if not quite so gorgeous as the Brough-Reeth road, is nevertheless a worthy companion. It is comparatively civilised, having several villages along it, to say nothing of the company of the railway, but even so, you are still very much in the real wilds, and, as on the other road, still, in spite of man and his works, thoroughly under the domination of the moors. When you have done this cruise, you will understand what I mean by domination. There is

no other word to describe your sensations at the end of this unforgettable day.

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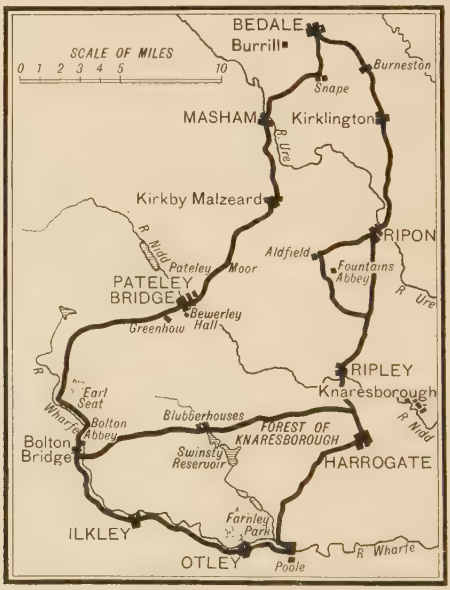
When you come to think of it, it is odd that, practically without exception, the spas and inland watering-places of Great Britain should have their setting in beautiful scenery. It is certainly a piece of luck for those who take their ills to those waters and for those who bear them company, but it is so curious a coincidence that there should be healing springs in specially pleasant surroundings, or, if you prefer it, that delightful country should add to its charms by the possession of curative waters, that the sceptical might almost be forgiven for throwing doubt on the properties of those fountains of health. Not that the spas themselves are always lovely creations. Buxton, Tunbridge Wells, and Llandrindod Wells are soundly-built, weather-proof towns, but you would not call them beautiful. Bath is an exception, and to a lesser degree, Harrogate, but nearly every one of them, from the least hideous to the passable, happens to have been put where the surrounding country is particularly attractive.

Among the luckiest is certainly Harrogate. It is not quite so well off in this respect as Llandrindod amid the dark Welsh hills, but it has moors, streams, wooded hills, and pleasant vales all within an easy day's drive. Within the span of a week-end it can offer you some of the most austerely beautiful scenery in all broad England, from the Lakes on the north-west to the great empty spaces of the North Riding Moors. There are places like Bolton Abbey and Fountains for the historically-minded to visit, not to mention York. Harrogate is fortunate, and doubly so because you can see sketches, as it were, of all its best in a single day.

A day's drive of only eighty miles or so—though all such drives should be elastic before anything else—which I place very high among the cruises to be made round Harrogate

is this. Take the road to Ripley and, immediately after leaving the town, turn to the left, along the Pateley Bridge road. Bear to the right at the lake in Bedlam Park and, crossing the miniature Scarah Moor, reach Fountains Abbey by way of the Haddockstones. Then take the road to Ripon and make for Bedale by Wath and Kirklington.



It is important that you should include Bedale in the cruise, not because of Bedale itself, but because the country south-west of it, into which you turn at once, affords a vital contrast to the rest of the day's drive. Between Bedale and Masham it is all good land, undulating, wooded above, and rich below in cultivation. The road twists about with difficulty among these abundant fields, and it is not until you have left behind Masham, Kirkby Malzeard, and the happy village of Laverton (a Cotswold hamlet of the north),

that you come into the land of open spaces, where the important people are the grouse, and heather takes the place of wheat.

The moors, if you go by measurements, are not large. Galphay and Pateley are mere patches compared to some of their brothers in the north, but, like everything else in this incomparable country of ours, they have their own exclusive beauty. They are dark and high and stern. A few miles before you come to the edge of them above Nidderdale they seem to be the last bit of the world left. Soon after you have begun to drop downhill, at an altitude of eight hundred and ten feet to be exact, you look out over the valley of the Nidd and see roads to Skipton and Blubberhouses pencilled against the sombre hill-sides for miles, for all the world like threads of cotton blowing loose. You are well above the rest of the world hereabouts. It is a place to halt in and be thankful for.

On your left is a dubious-looking road which you should take, against your common sense and the evidence of the map. As you turn on to it, but not before, you will see the most uselessly-placed notice-board imaginable, warning you that the road you are now on is the better one to Pateley Bridge. It takes you down a notable drop. You sink from about nine hundred and fifty feet to three hundred and fifty in not much more than a mile, and considerable prudence is advisable. Where you meet the Ripon road, and soon afterwards the Ripley road, there is ample opportunity for narrow shaves, unless you have all your wits about you. It is a fine climb out of Pateley and will certainly let you have the truth about your car's abilities. At the top, some one thousand four hundred feet above the sea-level, you find yourself once more on the roof of the world. At Greenhow itself and by Keld Houses you will be compelled to call another halt. A road which seems to soar into the skies, allowing you heady views of the common earth apparently thousands of feet below, is not a road. It is a witch's

broomstick of the finest kind, and proper respect must be paid to it.

After Keld Houses and Appletreewick Pasture you turn to the left down to Appletreewick itself (can you think of a better name than this, anything more real?) and meet the River Wharfe. I am not sure of the full extent of Wharfedale, but I seem to have heard of it in very different sorts of country. That through which it runs now is of exactly the right sort. Past Barden Tower and the Strid, the road carries you to Bolton Abbey and Bolton Bridge.

From Bolton Abbey you have the choice of two ways back to Harrogate—by Blubberhouses Moor, the way I should choose myself, or a way which must have been wonderful before they built the villas, following the Wharfe to Ilkley and Otley, where you turn off to the left and homeward.

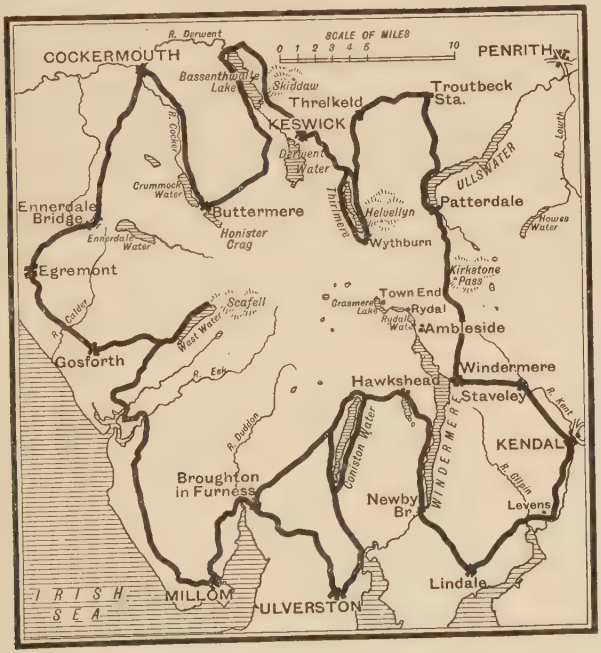
. . . . .

From the Yorkshire Moors it is very proper that you should go on to the Cumberland Fells, as I told the Devon man, forgetting all about Scotland until it was, if ever, necessary to remember his destination. No two neighbouring countrysides are so unlike.

Your true lover of England will not be drawn into the futility of comparison, but he will tell you one thing about the Fells—the Devon man was told—that they are the sort of place to which everyone instinctively returns whenever the chance offers. I would go further and say that you cannot know the beauties of those great pieces of water, and their sentinel hills, unless you see them in spring and autumn as well as in summer.

In many ways the English lakes and fells, compactly arranged in their handy promontory, make an ideal cruise for a few days. It is not particularly easy to explore every corner of them, and some of the best are, to put it bluntly,

mercifully inaccessible to cars. That is really one of the charms of the place, because, owing to its nearness to industrial centres, its main roads are apt to be uncomfortably crowded in the height of summer. An ideal cruising ground is incomplete without places which are inaccessible. One must have mystery—the seen yet unattainable.



Here is a course which will take you to practically every accessible part of the lake district. It is a tour which will involve a good deal of doubling, a certain amount of following of dead ends, and some rough going, but as you will be constantly amid hills there can be no question of your seeing the same thing twice or from the same point of view.

Taking Kendal as the starting-point, the road to Newby Bridge at the south end of Lake Windermere should first be

followed. This is a very typical piece of lakeland scenery, and at nightfall the motor-wanderer who has never seen an English lake before will realise that he knows nothing of England's real beauties.

After Newby Bridge, where there is a comfortable hotel, take the road winding along the west bank of Lake Windermere past Esthwaite Water to Hawkshead and there turn to the left and south, down the edge of Coniston Water. This road will bring you past Lowick Bridge to Grizebeck by the shorter way, but a detour can be made if desired to Ulverston.

Continuing north after Millom for some fifteen miles you come to a by-way of doubtful quality which will lead you to the head of Wast Water. This sheet lies immediately under Sca Pike and Fell, two very respectable hills of over three thousand feet in height. You must retrace your steps to the main road to Gosforth and carry on through Egremont to Ennerdale and Cockermouth. Here again you must be prepared for doubling back, and the road through Brackenthwaite to Buttermere should be followed. From Buttermere, between Crummock Water and Buttermere itself, you take the left hand road to Braithwaite and so up the west bank of Bassenthwaite Lake.

At the top of Bassenthwaite Lake you begin upon the very best of the lake country, and under the shadow of Skiddaw you come down to Keswick, and, if you are still in the mood for tracing complicated patterns with your wheels, make the circuit of the exquisite Thirlmere. There is a road on either bank and both are well worth following.

Striking north again from Thirlmere you reach the Penrith road at Threlkeld, following it to Troutbeck Station. Here, amidst wonderful open spaces, you turn south once more and come down to Ullswater, which many wise people say is the most beautiful of all the beautiful English lakes. That is a matter for your own judgment, but you may be

very sure that at first sight of it you will decide that there is no more beautiful lake to be seen anywhere.

Following the road south round the west end of the lake you come to Patterdale and eventually to the famous Kirkstone Pass, one of the finest climbs in the north of England.

You will be well advised to take the road to the left at the top instead of that to Ambleside, and come down into Windermere. If you wish to avoid the crowded road through Bowness you can return direct to Kendal by way of Staveley.

CHAPTER XIII

NORTHUMBRIA, YORKSHIRE

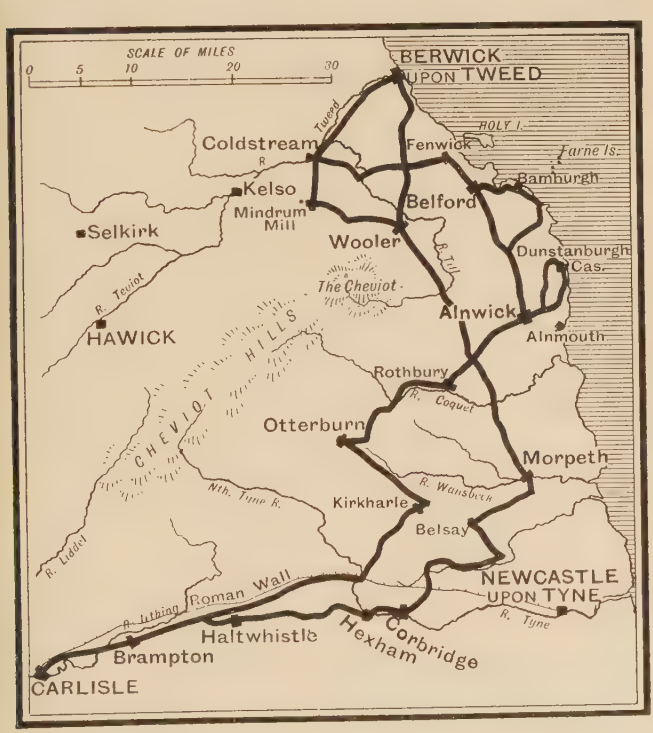
It is in high summer that the country north of Hadrian's Wall best repays a motoring-cruise. Generally speaking, every part of England is a delight for the motorist who does not object to rough weather at no matter what time of year. You can safely assume that in each season—indeed, in each month—England has a new and friendly face, and because of the ceaseless changes in colouring does in effect offer you new touring ground all the time.

North of the Wall, however, it is best, I think, to cruise in summer as, there is no denying it, it is a land which can be inhospitable in winter. Not only is its climate harsh but its picturesqueness and its faint colourings suffer a good deal under dark skies and amid bare trees.

In June and July it is delightful, especially for the southerner who has begun to mourn the passing of the early summer tree blossoms. Late in June, laburnum riots, amid the may and gorse, in the most heartening manner. Indeed, I think you would be put to it to find anywhere in Great Britain where the little yellow tree does itself so magnificently and displays itself so generously. It is no longer an ornament to gardens, but an important feature in the wild landscape itself.

Here is a round trip from Carlisle which will give the motor-cruiser a good idea of the austere beauty of Northumberland. I take Carlisle for a convenient starting and finishing point as it serves equally well for the dweller in the south of England and the Scot.

Take the road to Brampton and, leaving Haltwhistle on your right, skirting the little loughs at the edge of the Wall itself, follow it to Humshaugh. This is a fine road from which you have great views of the Fells to the north. At



Humshaugh, keep straight on by Chollerford to the main Newcastle-Hawick road, where you turn left, following the highway as far as the turning off to Elsdon, about eight miles north.

Soon after Elsdon you cross the River Coquet at Swinton, and at the next cross-roads bear to the right through Thropton to Rothbury. From Rothbury you have an easy

climb up to something a little over nine hundred feet, followed by a drop down again to Edlingham and Alnwick. Here you have a multitude of roads to choose from in your explorings of Northumberland. If you are in no hurry you can make a very leisurely and meandering tour of the coast between the mouth of the Aln and Bamburgh Castle. This will take you some time, as it is all a matter of following little by-roads down to the sea and every now and then having to retrace your steps inland to rejoin one or other of the highways which run north and south.

If you have no taste for this patient work you can follow the Great North Road from Alnwick onwards and see things just as fine. In fact, I prefer to do this myself. The road rides high above the bleak North Sea on your right, and from it you get fine views of the bays and havens along that dour coast. Just before you get into Belford you can see in the grey distance the Farne Islands, and to the north on a typical Northumberland day the faint flatness of Holy Island.

As you look east and north over those cold waters and west over the sweeping Northumbrian country with its iron-grey houses, and see the footprints of the winter gales on the bent heads of the great woods, you will think of the Winged Hats in *Rewards and Fairies*. The Winged Hats, you will remember, made some perilous landings and fought titanic actions in bitter weather along this coast, in their attempts to drive the Romans from the Wall. How desperate were those ventures and what the hardihood of the invaders must have been you can very easily guess for yourself when you look at those wintry beaches. Even in high July with a generous sun warming you and everything around you in flower, you will have no difficulty in making a picture of those Winged Hats in their ice-coated ships. The coast of Northumberland is a land where it always looks like winter.

About eight miles beyond Belford you should turn to

the left to Lowick and Ford. Immediately you get a dramatic change in scenery. Once away from those cold beaches you find yourself in a land where it might be almost always early summer. You are among the laburnums, the gorse, the may and the lilac, according to the weeks you choose for your cruise. After Ford you come down into the valley of the Till—a stream which must be a serious rival to the Meander itself, so mazelike is its course. Soon after crossing it you come past Flodden Field and so to the right to Coldstream, which is your turning point.

From here you can either go north to Berwick-on-Tweed and south again by Doddington and Wooler; or, after Flodden, you can bear to the left and, by Bowmont Water and Kirknewton, reach Wooler more quickly. The road between Kirknewton and Wooler runs under the foothills below the Cheviot and is in every way a road not to be missed if you would get a lasting impression of the austerity of Northumbria.

If you do not wish to retrace your steps by Rothbury, an alternative road home lies through Eglingham to Alnwick and Morpeth where, turning to the right, you can reach the road which runs along the Wall to Carlisle at Corbridge. This brings you back to Carlisle through Hexham and Haltwhistle.

Where England begins to narrow to the Wall, there opens a great choice of ways to the Lowlands and Highlands. Between and on either side of the obvious highways there are hundreds of miles of unsurpassed scenery which, besides being on the way to Scotland, are as well worth seeing as anything in the northern kingdom.

I should like to remind my northward-bound Devon man that they exist. Between the Tees and the Teviot there is much which I, as a hopeless lover of Devon, must insist he should see. Far more, indeed, than could ever be written down properly in a book, or anywhere else.

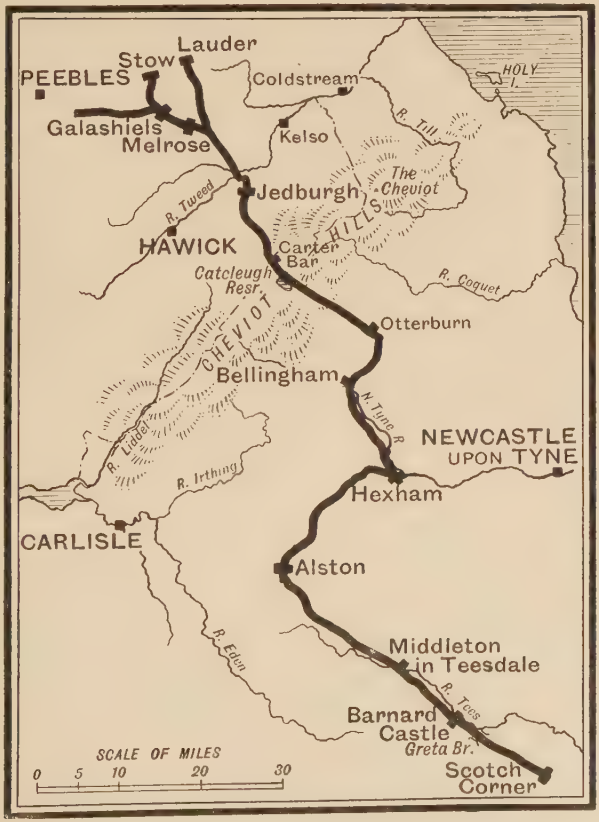
I left the man, I believe, in the Fells, or north of them. Very well. Let him come back over the incomparable Yorkshire moors, which have a new face every day for every traveller, to Carlisle, and from there to Barnard Castle. Nobody in possession of their senses could object to that. If they have, let them sell their car and buy something which will keep them at home. They do not deserve the freedom of the king's highway.

At Barnard Castle you meet the Tees and follow the valley of it till well beyond Middleton-in-Teesdale. At first there are no hills to worry about, but you get an idea of what is coming from the immense stretch of moor on either side of you. The road climbs steadily upwards, none the less, from about five hundred and fifty feet at Barnard Castle to one thousand feet or so just beyond Winch Bridge.

From here onwards your car seems to be climbing straight into the sky, the altitude rising steadily and quickly to one thousand three hundred, one thousand five hundred, one thousand seven hundred, and, just short of Alston, close upon two thousand feet—a very respectable height for an English road. This is a by-road, and none too wide, but it presents no real dangers or difficulties of any kind. In Alston turn to the right and take the road by Staward Station to Hexham. This is a long and exquisite run down to the River Tyne with great views of the Pennine Hills. It is a run that must be taken with a certain amount of care, as it holds some bends which call for caution, one special one being just before Staward Station. Between this and Haydon Bridge is one of the most lovely woodland hill drives imaginable. Pine and fir, cedar and beech, silver, pale and dark greens, glowing dark blues and browns succeed one another on either hand, from the blowy summit to the heart of the woods down by the river.

At Hexham you cross the Tyne, and a few miles farther

on, near Humshaugh, cross the line of the Roman Wall, and take the road to Bellingham. Along here you follow the Tyne once more over an up and down switchback road of



the most inspiring kind to a keen driver. It is a tricky road to navigate, and with all that astounding moorland scenery around you, gives you a great day with a first-class car.

From Bellingham to Otterburn is another delightfully mad road where the air intoxicates you, and with any luck

at all the only living things to see you go by are the black-faced sheep scattered about for miles among the flying blue shadows.

At Otterburn you join the Newcastle-Jedburgh road, one of the finest highways in every sense of the word in the United Kingdom. You climb steadily from about four hundred and fifty feet, following the course of the River Rede till the road runs alongside the Catcleugh reservoir, and at Carter Bar, one thousand three hundred and seventy-one feet up, you leave England for Scotland.

From the top of the pass over the Cheviot Hills, between two gaunt rocks, you have unrivalled views. Behind you stretches what seems to be the whole of Northumberland, and in front of you Roxburgh, Selkirk, and, with but a small stretch of imagination, the Pentland Hills in the far distance. It is a place in which a whole day can be spent with enormous satisfaction.

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All the hidden corners of England are wonderful in their several ways, but I always think of the lonely stretches of East Yorkshire, which lie to your left on your way back from the Wall, as worth very special exploration. Within twenty miles or so of the monstrous city which is composed of and bounded by Bradford, Leeds, Huddersfield, Wakefield, and Halifax, almost within sight of their smoke, you have some of the most typical lonely English country to be found in the kingdom. The promontory formed by the North and East Riding of Yorkshire is in early summer a particularly lovely hunting ground for those in search of the little by-ways.

Here is a great drive for you, on your way south, as well as for those who live in the cities of smoke. Taking York as the starting-place, the road to Great Driffield should be followed by way of Pocklington. Those who have a

leaning towards seaside places can follow on to Bridlington, and turn left there on to the Scarborough road, through Filey. This, however, cannot be looked upon as a by-way. Filey and Bridlington being far too flourishing examples of the popular seaside resort to allow you to gather any

impression of loneliness. An alternative and, to my mind, a better way to Scarborough is by the Langtoft road, due north and inland.

After Scarborough, as far as Whitby, the road carries you through magnificent scenery over the first of the moors which form the main background of this cruise. It is a wonderful road, running up to seven hundred feet above the sea, and from its highest point on Fylingdales Moor, you look out over Robin Hood's Bay and an immense spread

of the North Sea. At Whitby you turn inland on the road to Guisborough, where you first come across the Cleveland Hills. Over Danby Low Moor, where you reach an altitude of well over eight hundred feet, you enter one of those lonely spaces which draw the lovers of Yorkshire back year after year. After Guisborough the road becomes narrow, winding, and difficult to follow. Your main objective is a point just short of Helmsley, and the first signpost, as it were, is Great Ayton, and, about nine miles after that, Ingleby Greenhow Station. From here you climb up over Hasty Bank, past Chop Gate Inn, until you reach, by way of Newgate Hill, the exquisite expanse of Rievaulx Moor.

Follow this road to where it turns off to the road to Rievaulx Abbey itself and take the road to Scawton, which is the main village in the famous Hambleton Hills. There is a very sharp climb hereabouts, with a gradient of something like one in five, but the surface of the road is generally pretty fair. All this country between Guisborough and Thirsk has a charm of its own which is difficult to define. You have moors alternating with woods, high, steep hills, valleys and streams, and, as I said, you generally have it entirely to yourself. It is certainly one of the most beautiful places in the whole of Yorkshire.

After crossing Scawton Moor you come to the western edge of the Hambleton Hills, and are faced with the descent of the notorious Sutton Bank Hill, which reduces your altitude above sea-level from about a thousand to three hundred feet in a mile and a half. It is wise to take the warning notice-boards at the top quite seriously, as the descent begins with a violent drop of something steeper than one in four. The road is in excellent condition, and the once-dreaded hairpin bend has been considerably widened. From here your road back to York lies through Thirsk and the Great North Road, as far as Great Thirkleby, where you

turn to the left, and, passing through Coxwold, join the Helmsley-York road at Stillington, just north of the Forest of Caltrees. Wanderers from Harrogate reach home from Thirsk by way of Topcliffe and Boroughbridge, the same road serving Bradford, Leeds, and the other members of that family.

PART V

EAST OF THE TRENT AND OUSE

CLEY-NEXT-THE-SEA

CHAPTER XIV

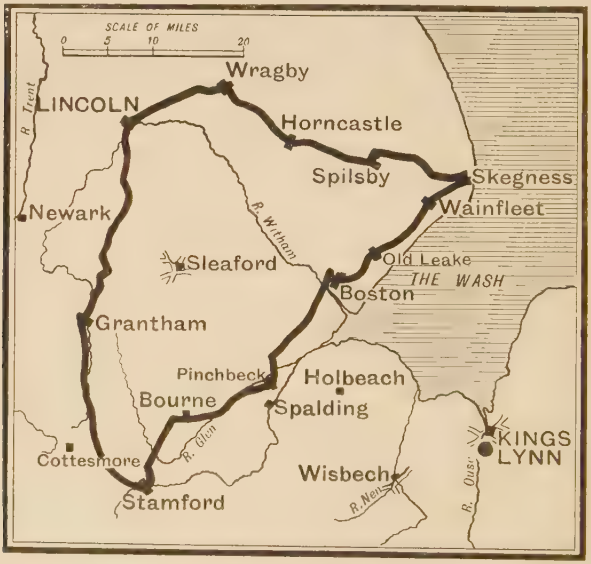
LINCOLNSHIRE, NORFOLK, SUFFOLK, ESSEX

That odd side of England which has been reclaimed from the grey North Sea, the Fen Country between the Humber and the Wash, may not, at first sight, strike you as a particularly interesting or picturesque place to explore by car. It is flat with a flatness which must be seen to be believed, which has its only counterpart across the waters, in Holland; its roads probably contain more right-angled turns than any others in the kingdom; and, except on the western side, timber is very sparse indeed.

Yet it has a curious fascination, a decided call to the imaginative, not unlike the call of the sea or the desert. It has, at all events in winter, no hint of colour to be compared with the riches of either of these, but there is something about the Fens which reminds you a little of both. The Fens, like the desert and the sea and cats, are the friend of no man, and any place, person, or thing which can successfully maintain this attitude must inevitably be interesting.

It is a land of dykes and flat expanse where hamlets look like towns and cottages like castles. It has very few towns,

but three of that select number, Stamford, Boston, and Lincoln, are among the most honourable to be found in England. Stamford is not exactly in the Fens, but it is close enough and beautiful enough to take pride of place over them all; except, at certain seasons and in certain lights, Lincoln on its unexpected hillock.



It is just because of this very aloofness that you will like it, as you wheel your car sharp left, sharp right, again and again, the few outstanding features of the scenery, such as windmills, swinging giddily about you, while the village you are making for becomes a close relation to the mirage-village of the desert in seeming to remain constantly at the same distance. It is a plain, blunt, mannerless country, as is natural to one so newly brought to life. One Cornelius Vermuyden was given the doubtless lucrative job of draining it, but, true to the possibly libellous rhyme

about the business side of the Dutch, in giving too little and asking too much, he seems to have lost the contract. It was finished by Rennie about a hundred years ago.

It is certainly all very Dutch, and it does not need a place-name like Holland to remind you of it. It is an enduring record of man's achievement in sifting gold from the sea—perhaps the only one in the world.

In January it will not be gold you think of as you drive along its uncurving roads, but rather silver-gilt. On a fair day, under that oddly penetrating sunshine which often makes the East Coast one of the pleasantest places to explore in winter, the Fen Country does look just like silver, faintly tinged with pale gold. It seems a vast stretch of land, the dykes intersect it like a pattern of cobwebs, and, wherever you may be, you feel and recognise the presence of the sea, the dispossessed. You smell it, though it be twenty miles off, and you see its footmarks in a hundred ways. For once in a way, you reflect, the sea has been beaten.

Make Stamford not only your starting-point for a drive through the Fens, but your headquarters. There are those, with every right to an opinion on the subject, who rank the older parts of Stamford with Cambridge, or even Oxford. It is a singularly gracious and dignified English town, in which it is a pleasant experience to stay a couple of nights. That is a very moderate view of one of the most picturesque places in the world.

On your way thence to the heart of the Fens you pass Bourne, of Hereward the Wake and Worth the dressmaker. Of such matchless diversities is this England of ours composed. What is there in the Fens which would send a lad of Bourne to Paris, there to clothe the fashionable women of at least two continents? Drive on to Pinchbeck, past Algarkirk, through Shirbeck Quarter to Boston, and try to find the answer. Was it the sight of the barges—the Little Ships of all the North—and the odd impression Boston

gives you of being a cousin of Dunkirk? It has little to do with Paris models.

To get at the whole of the Fen Country you should take the road to Skegness, through Wainfleet. Those odd twenty miles will probably seem as forty to you, not because they are monotonous, but because of the multitude of their corners. It is all well worth while, however, because you will be very close to the sea, from which the riches of the Fens were sucked, and you will be driving between them.

At Skegness turn westward for Spilsby, Horncastle, and Lincoln. You have a fine road under you, and the gradually thickening woods and "inland" country as you rise, ever so deliberately, from sea-level will make just the right contrast to the levels old Cornelius and Rennie wrested from the grimmest sea in the world. After these the two-hundred-feet hump on which Lincoln stands takes on the character of a mountain. It is quite certain that you will be reminded of a mountain town if you disregard the signposts which invite you to by-passes and drive up and down the streets of that ancient and friendly city, lorded over, in most medieval fashion, by its cathedral. Those streets are narrow and steep and very picturesque, and to-day quite unsuitable for motor-cars, and it may be that you will be more welcome in them on foot.

From Lincoln a straight road, usually of excellent surface, takes you to Grantham, where you join the Great North Road, and so come home to Stamford. A run of one hundred and sixty miles which you will be glad to have known. It is the only one of its kind in England.

. . . . .

Although East Anglia as a whole does not count many admirers of its scenery at any particular time of year, the northern part of it scores very heavily over nearly every other

county in one most important respect. When the rest of England is breathing thickly and depressedly in winter mists, whether of the English or the Scottish variety, North Norfolk and the parts round the edge of the Wash are very often blessed with sunshine. I must be fair and put it on record that it is not only the north which has bright skies in winter, but also that otherwise rather unattractive stretch which is bounded by Swaffham, Norwich, Brandon, and Diss.

There is a vigorous quality about the winter sunshine of this part of the world, and at that time of year I would sooner take my chance of the cold winds which shrivel the east coast and be gladdened by a really blue sky, than search for what is euphemistically termed the mild winter climate of the English Riviera. When the peculiarly dank, dark, and miserable January weather in the Midlands and London gets past all bearing, I strongly recommend you to head your car for the country of the Wash. You will very likely be cold, but the brightness of the air and the sincerity with which the sun shines—when it does make an appearance—will be a rich reward for your courage.

By far the best part of the Wash country lies, to be guilty of an Irishism, to the east of it, and not, as one might suppose from the map, to the south. If you have never driven along the sea road from Cromer, through Wells-next-the-Sea, past Hunstanton, and down to King's Lynn, you have before you a really delightful surprise. There are few places in England where such widely differing scenery is to be found within a distance of a few miles. If, as you will probably be doing, you approach Cromer from Norwich, you will see what I mean. Even the least dull road, through Wroxham and North Walsham, seems to have no relation whatsoever to its continuations another ten miles north. After Cromer you leave behind you a country which, although it has (like every inch of England) its own peculiar attractions, is admittedly monotonous, and, in a mile or so, you find

yourself in a land so fresh and unexpected, that you find it difficult to believe you are still in Norfolk.

The sea road runs past Weybourne and Cley-next-the-Sea,

and over the Morston Salt Marshes, through Stiffkey, to Wells, and every yard of it will be a delight. Gone are all the flat fields of the other Norfolk, and in their place you have sand dunes and little hills warmly clothed in pine and bracken and heather, birch and live-oak, and all the really nice trees. Although on the map it looks perfectly

flat, its undulations and curves put it well into the forefront of really desirable motoring roads. All the way from Cromer to Hunstanton, you are constantly within sight and smell of the North Sea, sometimes running at its level, sometimes swinging above it over commanding little rises, a mile or two inland.

I grant you that names like Cromer and Hunstanton do not suggest adventure so much as bathing machines and expensive hotels. Yet this road to the Wash always strikes me as being full of possibilities. The bird life round Wells, for example, will keep you busy watching for as many hours as you please. There is shooting of no mean order to be had on the salt marshes near Holkham, and the day that I drove along here there were lucky people about. When we walked into the inn at Wells for lunch, one of the fortunate shooters who were sitting round the fire in the bar-parlour, had the morning's bag under his chair, in the shape of a goose. I do not know, I am sure, why he should not put his goose there, but the effect was decidedly cheering, as was the sight, half an hour later, of his retriever transporting the bag to the back of his car.

You will like Wells and the country round it, not less because its village green, which is an excellent example of its type, is probably the only one in England which boasts a bandstand. Yet that bandstand is of an unassuming and rustic kind, and I feel sure that the tunes which are played in it, if any, are gratifyingly unsophisticated.

You carry on from Wells of the geese, to Brancaster, and at the corner of the Wash turn due south through Hunstanton and Heacham, past Sandringham, with its magnificent woods, and so come to King's Lynn, which is, I believe, the capital of the Wash country. All these roads along by the sea and through the woods are as a rule in excellent condition. I do not think that during the whole of a long day's exploration I came across a single muddy

or rough patch. A very friendly sun shone cheerily in the sky all day, and in windless corners laid a couple of friendly fingers on our shoulders. It cannot be said that the North Sea forms a picturesque addition to any scenery in winter, its naturally muddy complexion being more pronounced than ever, but it smells good, and I could not do without it on this merry road to the Wash.

If you ask me the best way to reach the most constant patch of winter sunlight, I am put to it to answer you. You can obviously go direct, by the Barnet by-pass and the Great North Road to Baldock, where you turn off to Newmarket, Thetford, Attleborough, and Norwich. Obviously; but I do not much care for it. The Newmarket road enjoys the reputation of being the fastest in the kingdom. It may be —though I feel inclined to put the Stockbridge-Basingstoke road before it—but that will never comfort me for its over-populated dullness. I prefer the slow-coach route by the coast.

There is, strictly speaking, no such thing as a real coast road round the eastern counties, but there is something which is really much better—a succession of by-ways, well away from the main road, which lead to numbers of little-known places which will delight you.

Starting from London, then, the road to Chelmsford should be taken, turning to the right in the town to Great Baddow and Danbury, a picturesque village occupying one of the very few noticeable rises in the flats of Essex. Keep on to Maldon and Heybridge, where the road to Tolleshunt D'Arcy should be taken and followed into Colchester. This takes you past a place-name, Layer-de-la-Haye, which is probably unique.

From Colchester make for Clacton-on-Sea and Walton-on-the-Naze. If you are not inclined to do so, it is not necessary to go through either of these places, as your road skirts their inland side. From Walton-on-the-Naze you

strike north-west by Hamford Water and, following a delightful winding road through Great and Little Oakley, come to Dovercourt and the edge of the Stour estuary, which you follow as far as Manningtree.

All this preliminary part is country which should be taken very leisurely, as indeed should the whole of the outward journey to the Wash. The nature of the roads themselves will not permit anything in the way of brisk averages, and it will be a crime to attempt to skip any of this quiet countryside.

Between Ipswich and Woodbridge you can make the run comfortably down to Felixstowe, returning by another road. From Woodbridge again make for the sea at Orford by Orford Ness, and then turn up north by Tunstall, to the junction of the road to Aldeburgh. From here all the way to Lowestoft you follow more or less the same procedure, dropping down from time to time from the main road to the various little places along the coast.

After Lowestoft the road becomes more of a real coast road, though in several places it swerves away from the sea, but it takes you through Gorleston, Yarmouth, Caister, Hemsby, and East Somerton before it breaks away. Here it traces three sides of a square, in the centre of which lie Hickling Broad, Martham Broad and Horsey Mere—a very pleasant square excellently adapted for lazy picnicking.

By taking advantage of the lesser lanes you can keep pretty well within sight and sound of the North Sea from here onward to King's Lynn, and your road might truthfully be called a coast way by Happisburgh, Mundesley, and Cromer.

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On your way to and from the land of frozen sunlight, geese, and tolerable winter, you pass close to a part of England which has a particular attraction for the kind of motor, wanderer who not only does not mind losing his way dozens

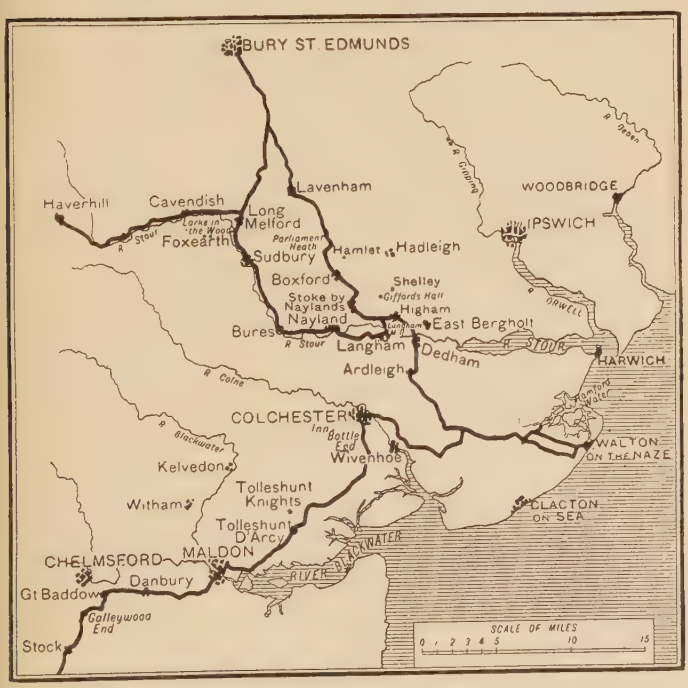
of times a day, but actually rather likes it, and that is the lower portion of Suffolk. If you take a half-inch-scale map of this part of East Anglia, not having known it before, the first thing that will strike you is the positively incredible number of roads. As you mark out your chosen course, it occurs to you that you had better keep a very careful and open eye on signposts, and you consequently arrange your journey with a generous margin of time. When you come to embark on the expedition, you will find that you have much under-estimated both the number of the roads and the need for that watchful eye. I firmly believe that only natives can with any certainty drive from one end to the other except by main roads—and not always then.

It is a very odd county, is Suffolk, in my humble opinion, because, although its average altitude above sea-level is ridiculous, it manages to conceal the fact from you with astonishing success. There are moments, as you grope your way along its ten thousand side roads, innocent of any kind of signposts showing any signs of intelligence, when you might be a thousand feet above the sea. Looking again at your map, on the square, let us say, due south of Bury St. Edmunds, including Ipswich and the borders of Essex, you will have quite a job to find any sort of a hill. Actually, I believe, the highest is a slight hump in the earth near Rede, which towers dizzily up to four hundred and twenty feet. As you wander, however, you seem to be entirely surrounded by perfectly respectable hills. There are charming corners of Suffolk, but they are always very close to you, and you may drive a whole day without once getting any sort of a prospect, as people who live in other parts of England understand the term.

It makes a very good country, therefore, for a motor tour, because you are constantly being deceived. You think you are where you are not. In the general run of things one would not recommend motor-touring in East

Anglia in the winter, but if you should at this particular period feel an impulse to find out exactly what made Constable paint his pictures, that is the time to go.

Constable's country is easily reached from most parts of



the Midlands and London. Coming from the north, the first place to make for is Bury St. Edmunds, and if you are doing it from the south, the same town serves equally well as a finishing-point. Supposing yourself to have arrived in Bury St. Edmunds from the west or north, your first objective is the River Stour, which you reach by way of Chedburgh, Stradishall, and Stoke-by-Clare. You do not actually enter Stoke-by-Clare itself, but turn off to the left

and follow the river and the railway, through Clare and Cavendish. You are immediately in what is known as the Constable country. It is all little hills very close to you, and woods and very wonderful meadows by the riverside, where large cattle stand, apparently as immovable as the ancient oaks. The River Stour is, as rivers go, a contemptible stream, but those meadows through which it crawls, and its encircling woods, give you many of the same ideas that came to Constable.

On your right, as you drive from Clare to Long Melford, you pass on the south side of the river a place which I think has the most beautiful name of any in England. It is called Larks in the Wood. Who could not be happy whose address was Larks in the Wood? Indeed, all this portion of Suffolk is singularly blessed in its place-names. Quite close to Larks in the Wood is Foxearth, and a few miles farther on, Parliament Heath and Hamlet and Shelley, near which is perhaps one of the finest Tudor houses in England.

At Long Melford, you have the choice of cutting across by Bridge Street to Lavenham and going down past Groton and Boxford, to the capital of the Constable country, at Dedham, or of still following the Stour by Sudbury, Bures, and Leyland. I do not think there is very much in the choice, especially as in either case you go past Langham Mill. Dedham to-day is a busier place than it was when the painter lived there, but it is made busy by visitors, or, if you prefer it, pilgrims. A mile or so away lies East Bergholt where Constable was born. If you come down the Boxford road it is worth your while to turn to the left at Langham Mill and to the right half a mile farther on, in order to go through the village of Higham, where there is a timbered house of the kind which is very rarely seen. You will have to be impertinent, as we were, and unblushingly stare at things, otherwise you will miss the wall bounding the garden, which has stone heads of animals and birds along its ancient face.

On your way back, leaving Dedham, you have a choice of roads. Myself, I would always take the road through Ardleigh and Weeley, to Thorpe-le-Soken, where, by daring a marshy lane, you come out upon a creek of Hamford Water, which at the right time of year is a kingdom of wild duck. If you take this road, you must return as far as the turning to Great Bentley on your left, and come to Colchester by way of Wivenhoe, where you join the road you would have followed if you had gone on from Dedham.

The usually horrible London-Colchester road can be pleasantly avoided by way of Tolleshunt D'Arcy, Maldon, Danbury Common, Great Baddow, Galleywood End, where a racecourse rings a church, the agreeable village of Stock, and Billericay. After this, on week-days, you join the new Southend road at Laindon, but on Sundays, if you are wise, the main old road to London by Shenfield. The easiest entrances into London on Sundays are those which are the worst on week-days. And this applies very specially to all this part.

For six days of the week the northern and eastern roads out of London are avoided by the experienced London motorist as if they were plague-stricken. Those dreaded parts of London, however, share, with Bond Street, a real day off. Just as the most famous street in the world, bounded by thoroughfares which are never idle, remains a desert on Sundays, so is the way north-east from London proper comfortably empty of heavy traffic. Sunday is the day to go east and north, and Sunday morning is the special time to choose for exploring Epping Forest, one of the most picturesque and least "done" one-day cruises within the thirty-mile radius.

You would naturally not suppose that Epping Forest and its surroundings, with the inevitable suggestions of blatant beanfeasts and Bank Holiday crowds, could be seriously considered as a desirable place to make a motor

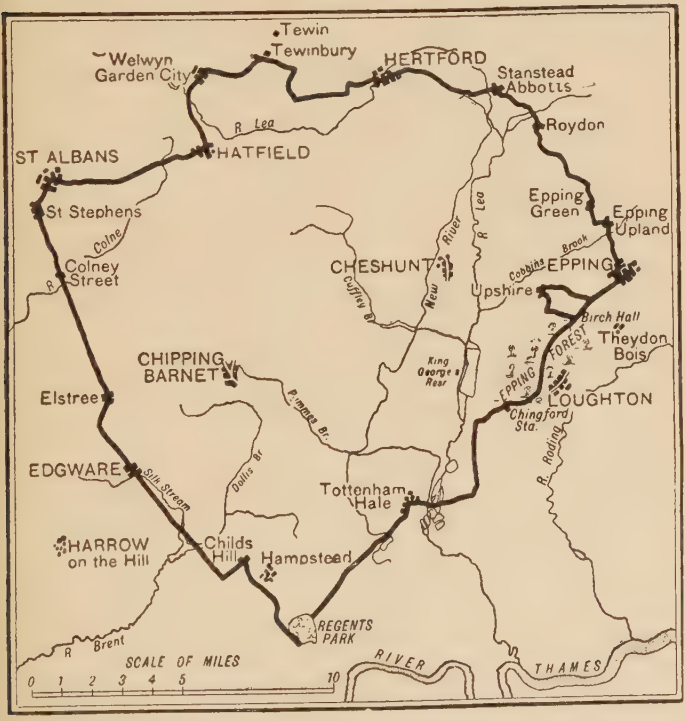
picnic in, much less a retreat in which you might hope to find peace and quiet. To many people who know the rest of their London outskirts well, Epping falls into the same category as Hampstead Heath or Wimbledon Common, that is, a place which may once have been a forest (a common or a heath) but is now only so considered by courtesy. Let these undeceive themselves without delay. Epping Forest is one of London's rarest possessions.

You must not, of course, choose a fine Saturday afternoon or a public holiday for your wanderings there, and from every aspect it is better to go in early summer rather than when the summer holidays are on. Just at this time is probably the happiest moment, as the forest is in its full glory, with the freshness of the young beech leaves still untainted by the grime which must dull them by August. You may spend hours in that wonderful wood with no company but your own, save that of birds. You are never as much as twenty miles from Piccadilly Circus, yet there are glades and clearings which you would put no nearer town than the New Forest.

There are odd corners of the wood in which you realise, suddenly and most surprisingly, that you are not, as you supposed, in a flat country. Round the edge of this or that clump you find, all unawares, that you are looking over a good many miles of country. All round Highbeech, King's Oak, Birch Hall, and Ambersbury Bank you are nearer four hundred than three hundred feet above sea-level, and as the country west of you (the forest "looks" west) across the valley of the Lea slopes up from practically sea-level to the little hills by Potter's Bar, you get a succession of exquisite views. On a blowy May day, with great balls of silver cloud chasing across the radiant blue, touching the landscape with miracle-working shadows, those hills beyond Enfield Chase and the woods which stretch between you and Stanstead Abbotts make pictures you are not likely

to forget. That they are all within fifty minutes' run of Regent Street is obviously incredible.

Epping Forest, in spite of the hundred different delightful corners it holds for the motor tramp, and notwithstanding



its magic feel of spaciousness, is quite small. Is it six miles long by a mile wide? It may be, by a narrow margin, and some of its edges are not so free as they should be. So your first wander there should take you home by another route. Properly to appreciate the wood, you must descend from its secluded heights and go westward to the views you have seen from amid its clearings. You can spend anything from two to six hours in getting to the end of it, for you are constantly

turning up this or that alluring lane, stopping and reversing to catch this or that glimpse of the open country outside, but you must not leave it to return instantly to mean streets and squalor. You must make a ring of your first cruise through Epping.

Here is the best way. Leave London, with Regent's Park as your starting-place, by the Camden and Seven Sisters Roads. At Seven Sisters Station turn to the right, and passing Blackhorse Road and Woodford Green, reach the edge of the forest just beyond the Reindeer Inn. I have shown the chief points you should make in the forest itself, but they are merely a skeleton plan. You will fill in the day for yourself without anyone's help, but you must start for home by going to Upshire, Epping, Epping Upland, and Epping Green, where you will find perhaps the finest view of the day. The genius who decided what trees should be planted in this place or in that was directly inspired from heaven to include exactly the right number of poplars hereabouts. Taken simply as a study of trees (an arid description of a masterpiece) the picture spread before you near Epping Green has few rivals in all green England.

Twisting and confusing and enchanting by-roads take you very leisurely to Roydon, Stanstead Abbotts, and Hertford, where you take the road by Hertingfordbury to Tewinbury, and, if you have a taste for such things, to Welwyn Garden City. For myself, I find the trimness of everything in that austere suburb a very good set-off to the Forest, and the country between. Epping Forest is very old, and Welwyn Garden City is very new, and both are of the best of their kind, but it is just as well that the ancient wood does not let its skirts drag any nearer to those comfortable-looking villas. Some of them are "period," others just plain houses, scarcely one, in the better planned part, anything but pleasant. But they would not do in Epping Forest. The great company of woodland trees has no use for self-consciousness.

PART VI

NORTH OF THE THAMES

CHAPTER XV

BUCKINGHAMSHIRE, HERTFORDSHIRE, BERKSHIRE

The hills and valleys of the Chilterns hold a thousand delights for the London motorist in every one of the twelve months of the year, but at no time are they more exquisite than when their royal beeches are putting on their new foliage. They are an extraordinary range of hills. They are not very high, yet from every way in which you approach them they are impressive; they are not really very extensive, being only some thirty-five miles long from their south-western end at the Pangbourne reach of the Thames to Luton, yet scores of days can easily be spent wandering about them; and they are almost wholly unspoilt.

It is this latter quality which has so strong an appeal for those of us who know those roads and lanes north of Henley. Their farthest point is only forty miles from Hyde Park Corner, and on their eastern flank there are over-crowded suburban settlements, in the centre High Wycombe, and at their nearer foot by Marlow all the urban qualities of the riverside. Yet they manage to keep themselves apart from the crowd, even from the immense road-rush over the week-ends.

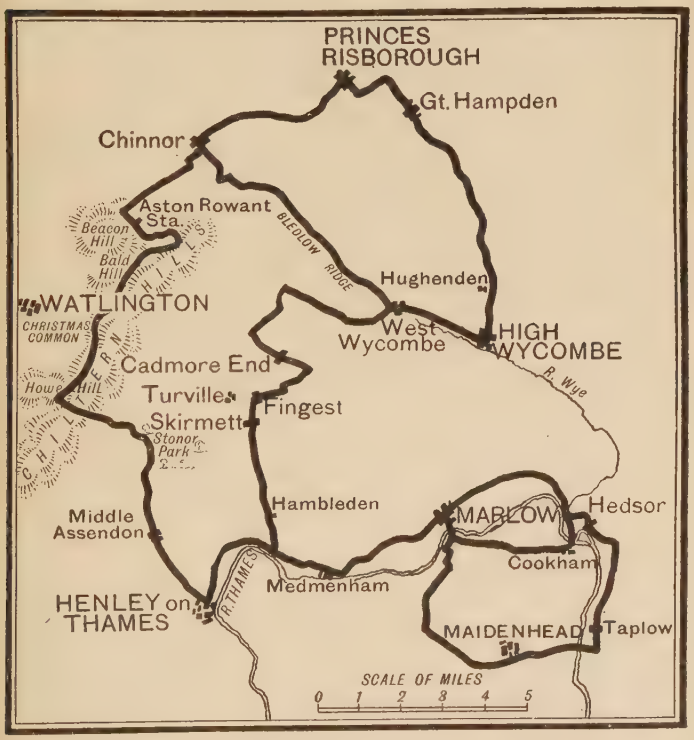
April is, perhaps, above all others, the month for motoring among the hills. It is then that from hill-tops you see spring in possession of the country most satisfactorily. There are some wonderful days before the new leaves on hedge and tree are more than buds, when, as you drive through the fields and along the valleys, you see that indefinable pinkish look about the woods and you know that whatever

the thermometer may do and the aneroid, nothing can stop the coming of real spring; yet it is when field and wood and stream-banks have put on their new clothes and jewels that you become again once more really aware of the beauty of England. In sun, rain, or wind, go to the hills this month for your first sight of the best picture of the year.

Here is a day's drive through the Chiltern valleys during which, even on a fine Sunday afternoon, you may quite likely meet not more than half a dozen cars, except in the towns themselves. Starting from Henley-on-Thames the road to Oxford should be followed as far as the fork at Assendon, and leaving the Nettlebed road on the left follow the Watlington road as far as Howe Hill. These six odd miles immediately initiate you into the charm of the Chilterns. The road, from the moment it leaves the fork, changes its character completely and, in the true Chiltern fashion, seems to pretend that it is a pass between high mountains. The hills come down to it on either side in magnificent sweeps, full of colour and shape. The brown carpets of leaves about the beech trunks on the higher slopes make a great background to the nearer woods, where at the proper time bluebells positively riot. Firs stand appropriately about near at hand and with those delightful tumbling brooks which you meet unexpectedly in these hills lend a very convincing air of real mountains to the whole.

As you come out on to the top of Howe Hill the overhanging banks of the winding road thrust gorse and thorn into the picture and you contentedly realise that there is not one single kind of tree or shrub missing from what is a perfect piece of English hill landscape. At Howe Hill turn to the right to Christmas Common and, crossing the Watlington road, keep on till you reach the main Oxford road just west of Stokenchurch. Along these last three or four miles by Bald Hill and Beacon Hill you will have

views over the levels towards Oxford which will keep you staring for a very long time. Not even the spread of country you see from the top of Kop Hill is finer than



what this Christmas Common road can show you. It is a place ideal for a picnic basket and a long day's rest.

When you reach the Oxford road turn to the left and follow it round those superb wooded curves to the cross-roads at the exact foot of the range. Turn to the right here and head for Chinnor. This gives you another and farther view of the Chilterns from below and serves to

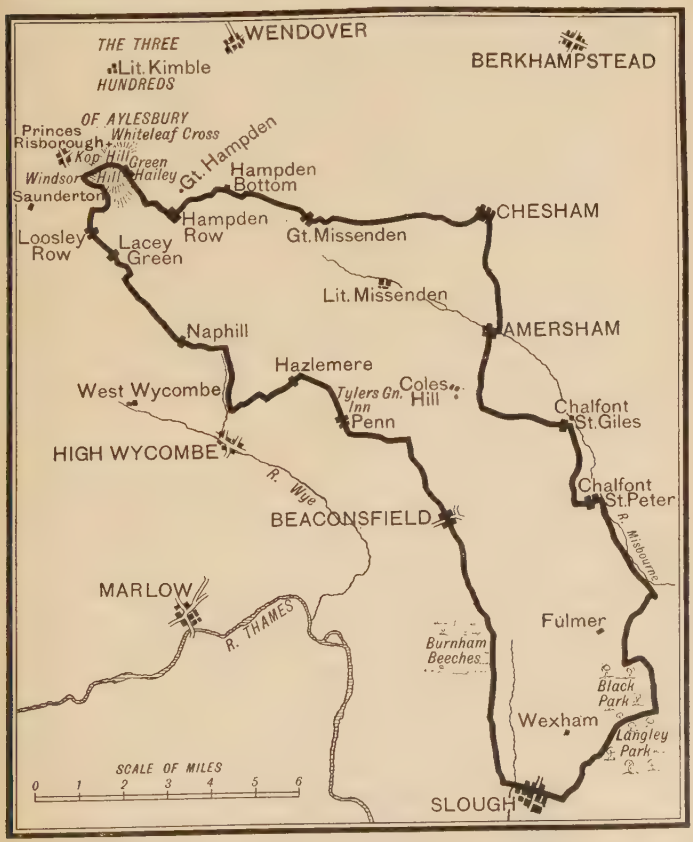
increase your longing to be back amongst them again. At Chinnor, if time presses, you can turn to the right and climb up on to Bledlow Ridge, a beautiful run which will bring you down to West Wycombe, but you will do far better to carry on to Princes Risborough, and by climbing Kop Hill make your way homewards by the Hampden Woods.

Here, indeed, you have distance and space and air of the right sort to breathe. The road you have just climbed drops abruptly into the blue valley, and on three sides of the hill-crest you stand on you see more and more pale ribbons of roads going west, south, and east across the plains and over the distant hills, some ruler-straight, others winding like little Surrey streams. Only to the north, behind the Three Hundreds of Aylesbury, is your view cut off. There may be, in fact there are, hill-tops in Great Britain from which you will see more than you can from Kop, but there is not one, short of a genuine mountain, which is so magnificently arranged for your comfort and content. It is a hillside for a whole day's peace, a day of lying on your back on the turf and staring into the blue and forgetting that such things as cities and the works of man exist.

From the top of the hill to Hughenden you will run through what seem like dense forests, and here again you will find a dozen spots in which to spend long hours in perfect content.

In High Wycombe turn to the right and follow the Oxford road through West Wycombe as far as Beacons Bottom, where a narrow lane presents itself to Fingest by Cadmore End. I am not sure that these five miles up and down hill through absolutely deserted hills and woods are not the most beautiful of the whole Chiltern range. The end of them at Fingest, that exquisite village, and the run down to the Thames by Hambleden closes your day's run among these enchanted hills as perfectly as the first miles from Henley by Howe Hill began it.

From Hambleden you should follow the road past Medmenham to Marlow. At this time of year this stretch is particularly beautiful, as you have Quarry Woods on your



right at their very finest. From Marlow your run home lies up the hill through Quarry Woods themselves to Maidenhead, a way I prefer for the end of a Chiltern run to the more popular one by Cookham, Hedsor, and Taplow.

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While it is true that, almost without exception, every month of the twelve is a month in which motor touring, either of long or short distances, can be really enjoyed in England, there are times when the open road has a special beauty. Chief among these, I think, I should count October, and especially the latter end of it, when the autumn colouring is at its very best. It may be cold and windy, and it may even be wet, but he would be a chilly-souled person who was not warmed by the sight of those wonderful reds, golds, browns, and oranges which are splashed in such a riot of extravagance over our woods.

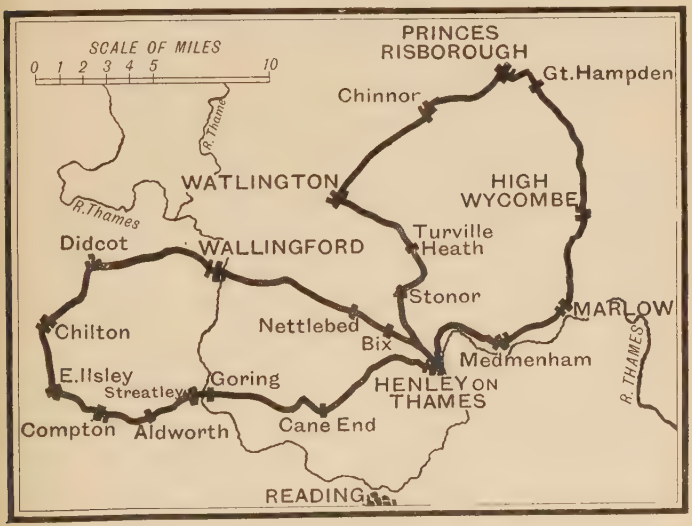
Of all the kinds of woods which turn most flamboyantly and at the same time most appealingly, beeches must rank very high, and the motor-cruiser in search of a pleasant October day's run should not forget that their glory passes quickly in any case, and may be swiftly ruined by early gales. London is extraordinarily fortunate in having some of the most perfect beech-woods in England within an easy day's drive, and it would be wise to disregard every weather condition, save that of fog, and make it your special business to go out towards the Chiltern Hills and see for yourself once again how perfect a month October is on the road.

The Londoner, on considering beech woods, naturally thinks first of Burnham Beeches, and it is through that perfect little forest that I should advise him to make his way towards the hills.

The Bath road to Slough is inevitable unless you care to make a detour through Staines and Windsor. This adds to the day's journey by some half an hour, but I always think that it is worth making an effort to avoid one of the most disagreeable high roads in the world. Burnham Beeches may be approached from either the east or the west end of Slough, through Wrexham and Stoke Poges and Farnham Royal, or from the west end direct through Farnham Royal. So exquisite is the foliage in the woods

at this time of year, that it is highly probable you will spend far more of your time wandering round those flaming glades than you had any intention of doing when you started out.

On leaving the wood, take the road to Marlow by Bourne End and crossing the river valley, on to Henley, through Quarry Woods. At Henley take the Fairmile road to



Oxford, as far as the fork, where you bear to the right, past Stonor Park and so up to Christmas Common and on to Watlington. All this way you run through more and more golden trees of such living colour that, as I said, nothing but fog could avail to tame their brilliance.

Turn to the right at Watlington, along the Aylesbury road and again to the right three miles farther on, just after Beacon Hill, joining the main Oxford-High Wycombe road by Aston Rowant. You have before you one of the most picturesque hills in the Home Counties, where the road, in

a long curve round the shoulder of the Chilterns, sweeps up to eight hundred feet, and you look back over the valley towards Oxford, Thame, and Abingdon.

Soon after reaching the summit, you come to the windy little hamlet of Stokenchurch, and you have the choice of two ways home. The more direct is the second turning on the right, by Cadmore End and Lane End to Marlow, but the pleasanter, I think, is the first turning on the right by Ibstone, to most ancient Fingest, and down to the Thames Valley at Mill End, by Hambleden. Here you turn again to the left at Medmenham Abbey, and so join the first road at Marlow. Take the Maidenhead road through Bisham, where you again meet the Quarry Woods, and climb straight up through them. About half-way up, you get another magnificent view over the valley of the Thames westward —a view which is framed on three sides by these incomparable beeches.

There is another way through these same woods by Cookham Dean, but although the road, after climbing a fine hill, runs pretty well buried in beeches, and is therefore a good and proper October road, there are no such views to be seen between the tree trunks as on the southern way. Both these join at Boulter's Lock, the first through Pinkney Green, on the outskirts of Maidenhead, and the second through Cookham. From Boulter's Lock the way home lies either along the Bath road through Slough, or, a much better way, through Bray, past the fine old almshouses, to Windsor and Staines.

. . . . .

With the possible exception of parts of the Kingston by-pass, not the most fervent supporter of the new arterial roads which are nearing completion all round London will proclaim them for their beauty. Some are useful; a few are, under the existing conditions of traffic control, distinctly

dangerous at certain hours; all are ugly with just that ugliness which, being the result of progress, is so difficult to soften. In the course of years the meagre saplings which now stand in sparse rows on each side may grow into imposing avenues of trees, but it will be a long time before the by-passes lose the resemblance to railway cuttings and race-tracks they bear to-day.

Yet the London motorist, who has only the week-end in which to do his cruising in search of clear air and free roads, has many reasons to be grateful to the man who first conceived the idea of freeing the congested outlets to the countryside by these ugly roads. They may be hideous; they may often be so crowded and unsafe as to make the prudent avoid them and use the old, half-deserted suburban exits; they may be remarkably badly built for wear, but they have one supreme quality in allowing the London motorist to get away from the pungent squalor of modern workaday London in the shortest possible time.

Some of the best of the Home Counties countryside lies just beyond the by-passes, and its beauties are perhaps better appreciated after a ten- or fifteen-mile run along those concrete tracks. Further, some of them run through some delightful country on their way to the open road—country which is now to be seen by the traveller by road for the first time in the history of England. You cannot say that of many road systems.

A good example of this, after the Kingston by-pass, is the new arterial road to the north which skirts Chipping Barnet and Hatfield. In itself it is quite as hideous as the Watford by-pass, though not, perhaps, so offensive as either the Great West Road or the Colnbrook by-pass, but it has given us a glimpse here and there of charming country places, fields, hills, and woods, with which one feels every sympathy at this ruthless public exposure of their ancient charms. Practically all the way from Mill Hill to where

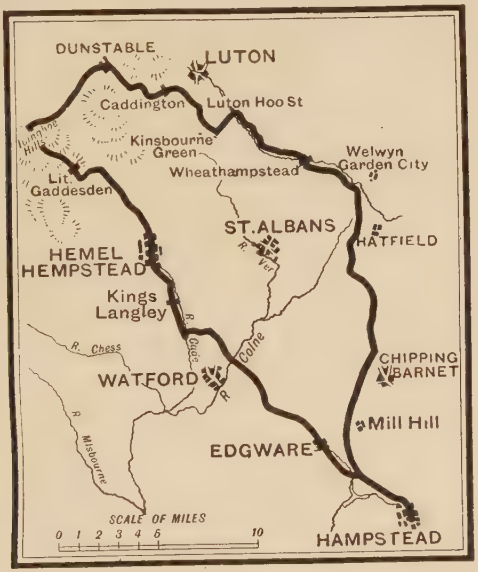
the road joins the Great North Road you see what is, in effect, country you never saw before, poisoned, it is true, here and there, by fearful bungaloid outbreaks, but in the main a pleasant place for a London-sick motorist to look at.

A very comfortable, easy, and picturesque Sunday drive, at this time of the year especially, when the roads are not likely to be crowded, can be made into the borders of Bedfordshire and Hertfordshire by using the Hatfield and Watford by-passes in this way. Start from London as if you were heading for Scotland, that is by way of Baker Street, Regent's Park, and St. John's Wood. At the top of the hill beyond Swiss Cottage the by-pass opens out on your left and thereafter all you need be on the look out for is the sign "Welwyn and the North." It is well to remember this, as the by-pass is sometimes confusing, crossing other arteries and having signposts which seem to read contradictorily. You do not go to Welwyn, but you follow the road there to within a few miles of it.

A little beyond the cross-road, Hatfield-St. Albans, you leave the road to the north at a fork and follow the Luton road, to the left. Here at once you are in real country, with real lanes and fields unspoiled by the jerry-builder. Except for Wheathampstead, you seem scarcely to pass a hamlet of more than a dozen houses until it is time to bear left again at Luton Hoo Station. Dunstable is your next objective and you can reach it more directly by way of Luton; but I prefer the winding lanes through Kinsbourne Green and Caddington, which bring you on to the Holyhead road for the last mile and a half into Dunstable.

Here you turn left, at the top of the town, down the Icknield Way, a wonderful road on a fine December afternoon. The bulk of the northern end of the Chilterns lies on your left, and as the road swings right and left, round enchanting curves, swooping into little valleys and up round

the shoulders of little hills, with all the Vale of Aylesbury spread out on your right, you cannot believe that London lies only thirty-odd miles away. It is, of course, due to the peculiar magic of the Chiltern Hills, which make a mockery of distance and reduce the study of altitudes to the level of a pedant's senile pastimes. If ever a by-pass is cut



through the Chilterns, it will assuredly be another road to Babylon or Samarkand.

Leave the Icknield Way at the fourth cross-roads after Dunstable and turn left up the Little Gaddesden Road. This gives you a most inspiriting climb over the Ivinghoe Hills, from which you get wonderful views on either hand. The surface is anything but good, but its roughness will seem of very little importance to you—if you have time to notice it at all. For on right and left you will be looking out over gracious parkland, circled by bold hills, such as

can only be found in England and seldom within an hour's run of Hyde Park Corner.

From Little Gaddesden your way home takes you through Hemel Hempstead and King's Langley, soon after which you run into the Watford by-pass. At the end of such a day's run you will be less inclined to complain of its ugliness than to be grateful for its width and straightness. Down from the woods and hills where you have probably driven for miles alone, you will appreciate its most important feature—you can get home remarkably swiftly.

A particularly enlivening eighty-mile winter day's drive.

. . . . .

They are talking of putting a check on the River Thames, not of harnessing it for any particular useful purpose, but of trying to put a stop to its annual holiday, when it enjoys itself thoroughly by removing from the riparian house-holders on its lower reaches every trace of their gardens, and giving them instead mushrooms on the dining-room carpet. This piece of news serves to remind one again that most of us only think of the Thames as an aqueous thoroughfare, navigable by a variety of vessels. We are apt to think, on hearing the word Thames, of regattas and houseboats and cold, rainy summers.

For myself, I have a far better use for the Thames than as a piece of water upon which to waste precious summer days. There are naturally moments and hours when, to say the least of it, you suffer no discomfort by being borne upon its bosom, and may even for a short time prefer to be there than anywhere else; but for the roadfarer by car, this particular river is interesting from a totally different point of view.

All, or most of the rest of England is nowadays tidily laid out. For example, you know pretty well to which hills certain railways go, and roads; and you know

where the lakes lie, and by what road you should travel to reach this or that beach of our enclosing seas; but the River Thames twists and turns in so baffling a manner as to make it very difficult for you to know where it will turn up next. It is in Middlesex and in Oxfordshire and in Berkshire and in Buckinghamshire, and it goes from one to the other in a series of wriggles. Roads and railways cross and re-cross it, run alongside it, and leave it abruptly —and, in fact, abandon it to its fate. The Thames is a superior stream, and acknowledges the control of nothing made of man.

That is the reason why it makes such an excellent short tour for the motorist to try to make his way along both its banks as far, say, as Shillingford Bridge and back. It is by no means an easy task, as you will find, when you have tried as often as I have, but the attempt is well worth making, for even though, at odd moments, you may find yourself confronted with some thoroughly disgusting place like Reading, with no escape round by either way, the little roads which run by the side, where no highways or railways or motor-bus routes have yet penetrated, are amongst the best things we have within fifty miles of London. All this applies, remember, every bit as much in the kind of winter under which we are suffering now, as in summer. For, as you may read every day in the papers, it is a most unruly stream, and apparently there is nothing it enjoys so much as flooding its banks for as far as possible and for as long as possible. Its floods, regarded in the proper light (I am not writing for those who have to live in them), add very considerably to its own beauties, on a sunny day, but in addition to this they have the advantage of adding a considerable element of adventure to your cruise. You may not always be able to go exactly where you want.

Here is a way in which you may occasionally be successful in attempting to fetch a compass about the Thames, between

Windsor and Wallingford and Wallingford and London. From Windsor take the road through Clewer as far as Bray Court, where you turn off to the right and, passing Jesus Hospital and the Fishery Estate, cross the Great Western Railway between Maidenhead and Taplow. Immediately after this you come upon the main Maidenhead-London road; turn to the right and then to the left, by way of Boulter's Lock and Cookham. From here onwards, for the next few miles, you must have the help of a very good map, because your next objective is Quarry Wood and Pinkney Green, and the way, though short, lies through a wilderness of little lanes. Still keeping the Thames on your right, you take the road to Hurley Bottom, past Temple Park and, cutting off a small corner at Remenham Hill, turn left-handed again at Ivy Gate, and follow the road to Twyford, passing on your way that pleasant hamlet, Wargrave. Here you are forced to be out of sight of the river until you get to Sonning, where you must cross it and turn left to Caversham. To be logical in your circling of the Thames, you should, of course, cross it here by the new bridge, and take the road to Purley and Pangbourne, but my advice would be to stay on the north side and, again with the help of a good map, continue westwards to the little highlands of the Chilterns, by way of Chazey Heath, Goring Heath, Cray's Pond, and Goring, where you cross it to Streatley.

Here you turn to the right again, and running through Moulsford and Wallingford, keep straight on till you reach Shillingford Bridge, which is your turning-point. Half a mile from the river turn right again and take the road to Benson. Bear to the right, however, before you get to that most chilly spot, and at Littleworth keep to your right past Preston Crowmarsh, and with the river on your right, go down to Newnham Murren and, crossing Grim's Ditch, past Mongewell House, North and South Stoke, and so again strike Goring. Here you will be well advised to

abandon the Thames (I told you that it was a difficult stream to follow) and make boldly across country by Woodcote and Checkendon, wandering by pleasant little lanes amongst the hills, arriving by way of Rotherfield Peppard at Shiplake, where you meet it once more.

Turn to the left, still with the river on your right, drive through Henley, past Fawley Court and Greenlands, and so go by Medmenham Abbey and Marlow to Bourne End, Hedsor, and through Cliveden Woods to Burnham Beeches and Slough.

This is a drive which it is well worth making, not only because of the constant surprises you will get at finding where you are at a given moment in relation to railways and roads and other landmarks, but because the scenery is the best the Thames Valley can give you, and except in a few places you are likely to have the roads to yourselves. On no account be discouraged because the month is December and not June. For myself, providing it is not actually raining, I infinitely prefer the former when I go exploring the Thames.

CHAPTER XVI

HUNTINGDONSHIRE, LINCOLNSHIRE, NORTHAMPTONSHIRE, BEDFORDSHIRE, OXFORDSHIRE, CAMBRIDGESHIRE

It would seem almost impossible for one to find a genuine backwater on English roads to-day. Until motor-cars began to swarm in real earnest over the face of the country, one would have considered Norfolk and certain parts of Suffolk as places off the main arteries of the country's life, north and south, east and west, though you may always find lonely spots, you will be hard put to it to find a lonely country. Norfolk and Suffolk were not exactly lonely before cars came, but they were out of the swirl of affairs. Their neglect, such as it was, is, however, nothing to be compared with the neglect of Huntingdonshire.

Neglect is not exactly the word for this queer county. It is more an overlooking. It is not large, and in general features it is so like its neighbours that travellers for the most part seem unaware of it, certainly those by road. Rutland has made a name for itself, or perhaps its school has, and because it is so small it is never missed even by the swiftest travellers; but, though the Great North Road itself goes through Huntingdonshire, few of us think of it on our way north. For one thing the road pointedly avoids the very capital itself, and the only highway of note which acknowledges it is the Ermine Street, which joins Huntingdon to Royston.

That delightful book, Cary's *Traveller's Companion*, published in 1806, which is generally full of information on "Gentry's Seats" in other counties, is depressingly silent

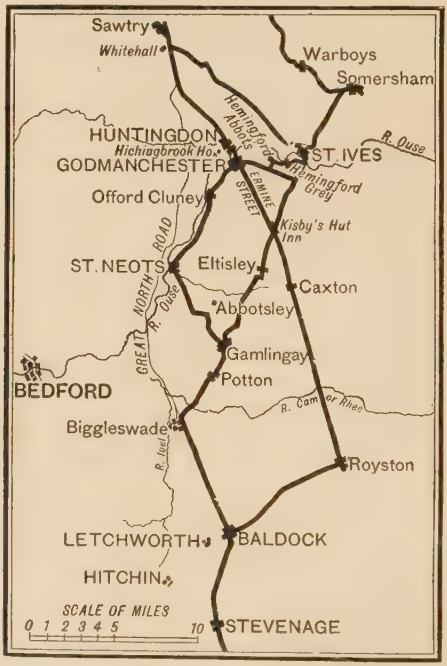
about Huntingdon. It is true that there are only three towns worthy of the name—Huntingdon, St. Ives, and St. Neots—but Cary seems either to have found nothing to write about in his guide book or not to have been there to see.

Last year I made a pilgrimage of apology to Huntingdon, having, like everybody else, neglected it most of these years, and I was able to make notes for a pleasant day's drive of a hundred and fifty miles or so from London. I say pilgrimage rather than visit, as that was what it turned out to be. For I had heard of the wonderful bridge which crosses the Ouse at Huntingdon, a fourteenth-century structure, even more beautiful than that at Stamford or Bideford, and of its equally ancient fellow at St. Ives, in the middle of which a chapel is built. This was converted, however, some two centuries ago, into a dwelling-house. St. Ives' bridge must, I think, be the only one of its kind.

Although Cary gives us very few "Gentry's Seats" (after all, the man may have been a snob, with ideas on rank), Huntingdon at one time had a good deal for the traveller to see. There are even traces of ruined abbeys and priories here and there, and there is or was, I am told, a house in a hamlet called Hemingford Grey, built during the reign of Richard Lionheart—a difficult thing to believe unless it was something in the nature of a stronghold, and made of stone. Apart from these, however, Huntingdon would attract you by the same spell as do so many English counties, from which you would not expect much. Look on the map and see how flat it all seems and how nearly at sea-level, and when you get there you will be amazed at the immense views you get of the green and placid country for miles around.

This, as it were, invisible county is distinguished very suitably by its extraordinary emptiness. It was a Saturday when I made my pilgrimage, and although shops and even

cinemas stood open in the three towns, they seemed to lack customers as much as the country roads lacked wayfarers. Out among the meadows I saw three yokels hanging by their fingers to the top of a high fence, and argued thence a village football match, but when I got a view of the hidden



field I saw it was empty save for one cow. If you want to go to a place where you are likely to meet the least number of human beings and see two wonderful old bridges in a radius of one hundred miles of London, try Huntingdon and go the way I went.

Take the Great North Road as far as Stevenage. After Baldock, take the road past Biggleswade to Potton, Gamlingay and Eltisley to Huntingdon. From Huntingdon make

for St. Ives and double back, thence to Godmanchester, past Hemingford Grey, and take the homeward road by Offord Cluney and St. Neots, joining the outward route at Gamlingay.

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The beauty of England is absolutely irrepressible and glows in the most unlikely places. It must sometimes be sought, but when it is found, no matter in what incredible surroundings, be sure that it is going to provide you with a delightful surprise.

Motorists who live near Birmingham, Leicester, and Leamington need not travel far to avoid manufacturing towns on their week-end trips, because westward they have the borders of Wales, and east and south the Cotswold country and the pleasant triangle which lies between Stamford, Woodstock, and Warwick.

I always think this particular slice of the Midlands is a good country to explore in the early spring. Most of the road runs pretty high up—which means that you see more of the open sky, and although the cold footprints of winter are still sharply defined on woods and fields, the effect does not depress you as much as it would in other parts of the country. This is where winter is in the picture and at its least offensive.

There are two pleasant towns to pass through, the kind of towns which one would deliberately go and see instead of avoiding even on the most rustic of journeys. Stamford, for example, which is certainly one of the most beautiful towns in England, if not in Europe, and which the great majority of motorists know only as a place you go through very fast on the way up the Great North Road. Buckingham is another market town of the historic kind, and Banbury, and at certain times during the year there is a most unexpected charm about Bedford.

The round tour which takes you through these pleasant

places can be started from Birmingham, Coventry, or Leicester, with equal ease, but for the sake of convenience I will take Leamington as the starting-point. Take the road first to Rugby and on to Market Harborough, where the Leicester wanderers would join in. Between Leamington and Wilbarston the road runs through typical Shire country,

which, in its own way, has no rival anywhere in the world, but with almost startling suddenness things change.

You leave the Oundle road and turn to the left for Uppingham. You drop down into the valley of the Welland River and by picturesque Rockingham you climb up on the bleak hill-top which is crowned by Uppingham. If, as the inhabitants of each assert, every English county has its own style of beauty, you have an opportunity here of testing the truth of it in Rutland, the county in which it is

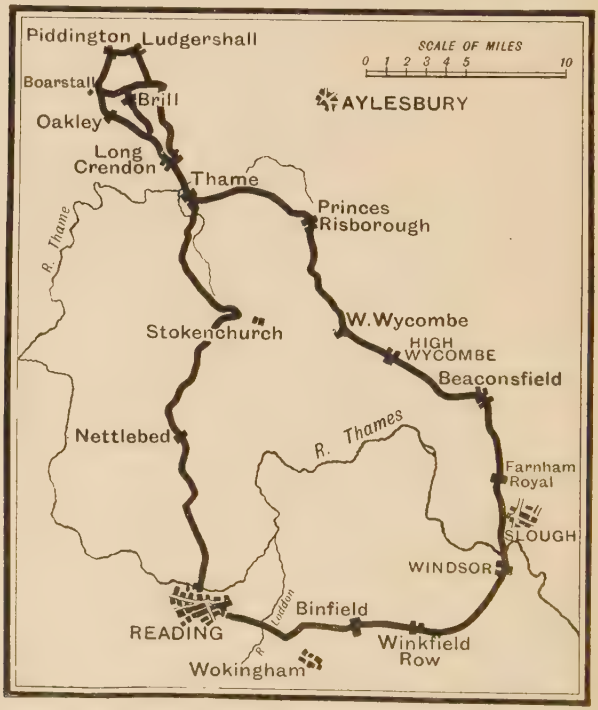
so difficult to remain for more than a few miles. Rutland may be hemmed in by Lincolnshire, Leicestershire, and Northamptonshire, but you need not be of the county to admit that it is decidedly different from its neighbours.

From Uppingham you come down to wonderful Stamford, the town with buildings which look as if they had been stolen from Oxford or Cambridge, with a main street which creeps round the buttresses of churches in a way which can only be seen on the Continent. There are houses in Stamford which make you intolerably envious of the lucky owners, and when you cross the bridge and walk north towards them and look upon those three church towers, you will be hard to please if you do not write down Stamford as one of the most beautiful towns within reach of car-wheels.

For the eastern side of the triangle you have an almost straight road from Stamford to Woodstock, which runs through Kettering, Northampton, Towcester, and Brackley. Should time press, this road can be taken without hesitation, in spite of Kettering and Northampton, provided you make the journey on a Sunday. In any case neither of these towns, busy and crowded as they are on weekdays, is really a serious obstacle to your country run; but if you have the time and are disinclined to risk it, your best plan is to follow the Great North Road from Stamford as far as Wansford, where you turn off to the right on the road to Oundle and come down again to the Great North Road by Kimbolton at St. Neots. This is, of course, a detour; but as the Great North Road is by no means at its most picturesque between Stamford and St. Neots, I always think it worth while making.

Soon after Eaton Socon outside St. Neots you leave the Great North Road on your left and carry on to Bedford. You pass through Newport Pagnell and Stony Stratford, and come up into pleasant open down country by Buckingham. From here you can, if you are in a hurry, return to

Leamington by way of Brackley, but to complete the extraordinary number of contrasts in this varied patch of England you should keep on south-west to Bicester and make your turning-point Woodstock, where once more



you come into the land of the grey stone walls. The homeward run by Deddington and Banbury is along a pleasant and friendly road with fine views on either hand.

A few miles south of Bicester is the little village of Brill, set on a hillock nearly six hundred feet high, in a country where, north of the Chilterns, there is nothing deserving of a name more definite than rising ground. It is well worth going to Brill—and to its companion, Muswell Hill, which

is even higher—not only because it is a very picturesque village, with the necessary green, inhabited by white ducks, and a windmill and some ancient houses, but because the views thereabouts are magnificent. On a clear day you look south across the meadows to Shotover Hill and north to Bicester. It is an odd little place, sitting aloof from the world on its hill much as Fingest lies carefully out of sight in its fold of a Chiltern hill-side. There are many like these in England, and it is a very merciful thing that they are still left so much in peace.

One of the pleasantest ways of reaching Brill is the approach from the south, say, from Reading way, making a longish drive of it, so as to reach the odd little place after fifty miles of sharply contrasting countryside. Leave Reading by the Wokingham road, with Windsor as your first objective. The main road through Bracknell and Ascot was not long ago one of the least spoilt highways in the country, but latterly it has been overtaken by an outbreak of bungalows of a peculiarly repulsive kind, and it is no longer the road it was. It is better to leave it a mile before Wokingham, turning to the left for Binfield and Winkfield Row.

This is always an attractive drive, and it brings you on to the Ascot-Windsor road at Woodside. Then follows the familiar but invariably lovely run through Windsor Great Park, at this time of year in as great beauty as in high summer. Keep straight on through Eton to Slough, turn to the left at the cross-roads, and, half a mile down the Bath road, to the right, on the road to Farnham Royal and Beaconsfield. Between these two places you run through a little miniature hill country by Farnham Common. It is another of the inexhaustible sources of surprises England keeps for her lovers. You are within a few miles of places like Slough, with its menacing factories, of Uxbridge, with its trams, of High Wycombe, yet for a couple of miles or so you seem to be in the heart of remote woodland.

At Beaconsfield you must take the main Oxford-London road through High Wycombe as far as the fork by West Wycombe, at the foot of Dashwood Hill. Bear to the right here and take the road under the hills by Great Missenden and Hampden to Princes Risborough, and across the flats to Thame. Immediately you have crossed the Watlington-Aylesbury road, which bounds the north-west edge of the Chilterns, you are in real Bucks and Oxfordshire by-ways, and, at all events in winter, it is very unlikely you will meet more than a handful of fellow-travellers.

A mile or so beyond Thame, at Long Crendon, you have the choice of two ways to Brill. The first, longest, and most picturesque is to bear to the right for Easington and Chilton. This brings you, across the railway at Dorton, to Ludgershall, past Wootton Park, where you turn sharp left to Piddington, and again left, on the Boarstall road, for a mile. The first road on your left takes you up Muswell Hill and across the dip to Brill. If you are disinclined for by-road wanderings, you can shorten them by keeping straight from Long Crendon, turning off to the right at Oakley for Brill.

Your way home lies through Thame and up the long, sweeping climb from Aston Rowant to within a mile of Stokenchurch. Here a road to the right leads you very pleasantly indeed to Nettlebed, by Cookley Green, and thence to Reading by Rotherfield Peppard.

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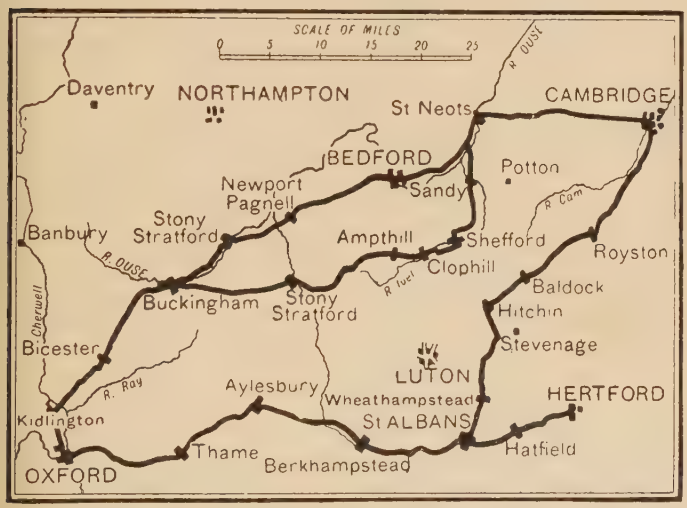
One of the best week-end drives to be found in this part of the world is the cross-country road from Oxford to Cambridge by Bicester, Buckingham, and Bedford, and back by Royston, St. Albans, Aylesbury, and Thame. The scenery changes with almost every mile. Once you have cleared the northern suburbs of Oxford and passed Kidlington, your way lies through that stone-walled country of

Oxfordshire and Buckinghamshire which has always so mysterious an appeal for those who have once lived in it. Submitted to a critical examination, those grey-walled fields may not show any outstanding feature of beauty, but there is a homeliness about them and a distinct difference from other kinds of country which makes them very pleasant to drive through.



The country changes again after Buckingham as you go down past the Ouse to Stony Stratford; here you meet the Watling Street and turn Londonwards for a mile, and then left at Galley Hill for Wolverton and Newport Pagnell. All this part of the world is very much of the cross-country order, with countless little roads coming to meet you on either hand, and forks and doubtful turnings beyond all count. A quite first-class map is invaluable unless you are in no hurry; you should not be in any hurry, as the quiet, homely scenery can be enjoyed only in a leisurely way.

Then comes Bedford, one of the few remaining county

towns, I always imagine, which really deserve the epithet "sleepy." It was never quite clear to me what the Victorian novelist meant by a sleepy county town until I saw Bedford for the first time. Its sleepiness, or whatever quality is represented by that word, is very refreshing when you remember the hideous turmoil into which both Oxford and Cambridge have been hurled within the past twenty years. The eleven miles which separate Bedford from St. Neots, where you come across the Great North Road, form a very suitable background for the sleepy town, but as you start on the last seventeen miles to Cambridge by way of Caxton Gibbet, once more you see the face of the country swiftly yet imperceptibly changing its character. Those who hold that Cambridgeshire has charm only in its villages could not do better than drive leisurely along those thirty-eight miles from Bedford.

This run outwards to Cambridge from Oxford is eighty-eight miles, but in spite of the winding nature of the road and the considerable places through which it passes, the run can be very easily done in three hours: four would be a far better time to give to it, for reasons I have pointed out. It is one of the most typical cross-country roads within a long distance of London. You climb to no great heights—nothing more than three hundred feet—and most of the drive is well down towards sea-level; yet your view on either hand is nearly always surprisingly spacious. You can follow a very pleasant alternative run after Stony Stratford by following the Watling Street as far as Little Brickhill, where you turn off to the left to Woburn, Ampthill, and, if you have any desire to visit the sleepy city, to Clophill, Shefford, and so up to St. Neots by way of Sandy. All this is very pleasant, quiet country, a kind of peaceful background between the roaring streams of traffic on the Watling Street to the west and the Great North Road to the east.

Your way back lies at first along the main Cambridge-

London road, which, in spite of its urbanity and general efficiency as an example of the king's highway, has, none the less, many picturesque miles. After Royston, Baldock, and Hitchin, you make for St. Albans, but if you are wise you will miss Hatfield and turn off to the right at Codicote, where a road leads you through Wheathampstead to St. Albans. The next few miles, it cannot be denied, run through country which is in the grip of the jerry-builder and the richer suburban dweller. That, however, does not detract seriously from the charm of the woods and hills, especially after you have passed Hemel Hempstead and come down again upon the Aylesbury road. Before you, and on either hand, lie the Chilterns, and it would take much jerry-building energy to make any permanent impression on those magic hills.

The last stage of your journey by Tring, Aylesbury, and Thame carries you round a curve of the Chilterns and down into the Vale of Aylesbury. Soon after this you come once again by Thame and Wheatley into the country of the grey stone walls, leaving the last of those pleasant fields between Wheatley and the top of Headington Hill. The total distance, either by the Bedford or by the alternative route, is approximately one hundred and seventy miles, or a little less, and to my thinking, forms a particularly comfortable and pleasant Saturday and Sunday cruise in either direction.

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